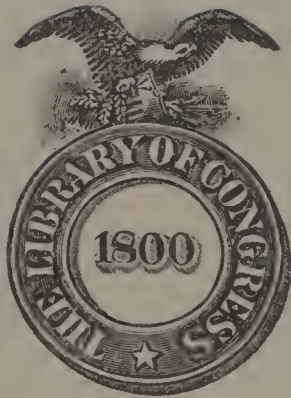


THE HOUSE OF SECLUSION

MARION HARVEY



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THE HOUSE OF SECLUSION

THE HOUSE OF SECLUSION

BY
MARION HARVEY
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CHAPTER I

THE IMPORTUNATE STRANGER

ANYTHING at all can happen in New York. Miss Warner, Philip Norris' trim and efficient secretary, was not aware of the axiom, being new to the metropolis; so she was startled when the stranger slipped into the outer office and asked for her employer in a reedy voice that trembled with suppressed emotion.

He was not prepossessing, this stranger; long, lean, gray, with the pallor of a man who has dwelt too long within doors. Moreover there was a furtive look about his close-set, rheumy eyes that gave the distinct impression that he lived in perpetual fear of being found out.

Miss Warner, from her sheltered aloofness and utter lack of contact with the seamier side of life, viewed with disapproval the battered black hat, the thin frayed overcoat, the worn boots, the heavy powdering of snow which was fast turning to water in the warmth of the office

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to the detriment of the luxurious carpet. She hesitated visibly.

She was the bulwark between Philip Norris and all importunate strangers; yet the fact that this shabby creature had braved the storm of that December afternoon argued a seriousness of purpose that could not be lightly cast aside.

The man, watchfully intent, read the indecision in this precise young woman's face and edged closer to the desk.

"Tell him it's important, Miss, very important. Tell him Fordney's here with a message," he urged in his thin wavering voice.

Impressed by the man's perturbed manner and entirely ignorant of her employer's private affairs, Miss Warner bade the old man be seated.

"I'll let Mr. Norris know that you are here." She opened the door on the left and entered the laboratory where Philip Norris and his assistants conducted their chemical experiments.

The chemist was alone, bending anxiously over a bubbling retort, so absorbed in his work that he failed to hear the opening of the door behind him. So Miss Warner paused a moment to admire in secret, as she often did, the tall, well-knit figure and dark, purposeful countenance of the young chemist who at thirty-two had already made a name for himself in the

fields of analysis and research. Presently she gave him her message and watched him turn slowly toward her, a faraway expression in the fine gray eyes.

Involuntarily she smiled, knowing that he had heard no word of what she had said, and patiently repeated her summons.

"Fordney, did you say?" questioned Norris, rousing himself from his abstraction. "I can't recall the name. What does he look like?"

Miss Warner's manner was superior. "A rather poor sort of creature. He's quite shabby, very probably a beggar."

Norris frowned in meditative silence, and then shook his head. "The name is new to me, I'm sure. He said it was very important?"

"Yes, very important, or I should not have disturbed you. But then that may have been merely a ruse on his part," she replied.

"I may as well have a look at him. Might be something in it. In any case, he may need help, poor fellow."

Miss Warner doubted that her employer's generosity would be merited. She kept her opinion to herself, however; as she followed Norris into the outer office.

At sight of the chemist, the man jumped to his feet as if he had been suddenly electrified

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and, dropping his hat, held out shaking hands in the other's direction.

"Mr. Phil, sir. Is — is it really you, sir?" he quavered.

"James Forthright!" exclaimed Norris dumfoundedly.

"Sh-h." The man looked apprehensively toward Miss Warner. "Fordney, Mr. Phil. That's my name. Fordney."

Norris gazed into the wrinkled gray face in amazement, then grasping the bony arm, he half led, half dragged the other into his laboratory and closed the door.

"Now," he said grimly, "what's the trouble? And why have you changed your name?" Norris looked at the old man intently. "Haven't been in jail by any chance, eh?"

"No, no, Mr. Phil." Fordney seemed shocked at the suggestion. "What made you think that, sir?"

"You look like a man who has been deprived of sunshine for a good many years. That and your change of name were what made me think you had run counter to the law," replied the chemist thoughtfully.

The old fellow shook his head. "I haven't been in jail, sir. But I have lived indoors a goodish bit of late. I only come out at night

and when it storms and there is no one about. Not that I've done anything wrong, sir."

Norris eyed the other shrewdly for a moment. "You haven't answered my question. Why have you changed your name?"

An expression of dread stole into Fordney's weak, watery eyes. He lowered his voice to a thin thread.

"Mr. Fielding made me do it, sir," he whispered.

"Mr. Fielding?"

"Your Uncle Jonas, Mr. Phil."

"Uncle Jonas?" Norris was clearly startled. "I thought he was dead long ago. It must be all of ten years since I've heard of him."

When the other remained mute, Norris continued sharply, "So he found it necessary to change his identity, did he? What's the game now, Forthright?"

"Fordney, Mr. Phil, please. Fordney. For God's sake, remember that. Even strange walls have ears." There was such genuine terror in the man's tones that Norris was quite taken aback.

There was something grim, tragic, behind this change of name on the part of his uncle's servant. It was not simply the desire to please an irascible and eccentric master, then.

Abruptly Norris spoke. "Why have you come here?"

"Your uncle sent me. He wants you to come to see him, Mr. Phil."

"What for? Is he in trouble?"

"No, Mr. Phil, not exactly; at least, not the kind of trouble you mean." Fordney hesitated, choosing his words. "He's getting an old man, now, Mr. Phil. He's sixty. You are all the kin he has. He wants to see you before he dies."

Norris took a turn up and down the white-tiled room. "Sixty is not old, not in these times. He may not die for years."

"It isn't always years that age," answered Fordney, sadly. "Your uncle, Mr. Phil, is old. He may not live so very much longer."

"Strange that he should suddenly conceive so active an interest in me after the lapse of a decade," commented Norris dubiously.

"He had his reasons for silence. I would go, Mr. Phil."

Norris debated the issue. Curiosity, that great moving force of the universe, began to prick him like a goad. There was some mystery here, something unusual germinating below the surface, which it might be as well for him to know about.

His musing had carried him to the frost-

starred window. Subconsciously his eye dwelt upon the wind-swept waste of white-shrouded world. He spoke accordingly. "Give me Uncle Jonas' address and I'll call on him tomorrow. It's too stormy to bother today."

But Fordney shook his old head resolutely. "It will have to be now or not at all, Mr. Phil. I can't risk coming here again and I can't tell you where he lives."

"What nonsense. If you take me to him I am bound, in the very nature of things, to learn his address; so why not tell me now? I won't divulge it. Unless," he added as Fordney continued stubbornly silent, "you intend to serve me as the cobbler was served by Ali Baba's servant in 'The Arabian Nights.' I wouldn't put such a scheme past a man of my uncle's ingenuity."

"I don't understand what you mean, Mr. Phil." Fordney was so genuinely puzzled, so matter of fact, that Norris could not help laughing.

In answer to that pleasant sound the feeble ghost of a smile hovered for an instant about the cracked lips of the old servant. "What scheme do you mean, sir?"

"Why, the very ancient trick of leading me blindfold to my destination," replied Norris with a twinkle.

“ Oh, no, Mr. Phil.” Fordney was disturbed that such an idea should have found lodgment in the chemist’s mind.

“ Then what’s the objection to giving me the address?”

“ I can’t, Mr. Phil. Your uncle made me promise not to. Besides you couldn’t go alone. You would not be able to get into the house.” Fordney was so distressed that Norris from very kindness ceased to importune further.

He returned to his interrupted experiment, and while his fingers were busied with lowering the gas and stirring the mixture, his brain was occupied with Fordney’s unusual summons.

Norris was still young enough to enjoy hazard. This promised to prove an adventure of sorts. At least there was an element of strangeness that intrigued him. Then, too, the man was his uncle and he might be in want; was in want if Fordney’s appearance could be taken as an indication. However little Norris might approve of his uncle’s mode of life, he could not, for his mother’s sake, entirely ignore this last request.

Slowly, like a man who is not yet sure of his own mind, Norris divested himself of his acid-stained apron and slipped into his coat. He really ought to stay and finish his work. He

glanced from the bubbling pan to Fordney's thin face — and reached for his overcoat and hat. The lure of adventure had proved stronger than the monotony of duty.

Fordney, who had been watching the young man furtively with anxious eyes, drew a relieved breath but remained discreetly silent. In the office Norris paused to give Miss Warner some final instructions.

"I won't be back again today. You can close the office as soon as you finish that report. Be sure to turn the gas out under the pan on the stove. It can continue to boil until you are ready to leave."

"Very well, Mr. Norris," responded the young woman mechanically. She was thinking, "I wonder where you are going with that ill-dressed creature."

Norris, too, was wondering about his destination as he and Fordney stepped from the heated building into the semi-darkness of the storm. Although it was barely five o'clock the gloom was almost impenetrable. The lights on Fourth Avenue shone faintly through the curtain of snow and down the cañon-like side streets the wind was tearing and shrieking like a soul in torment.

Burying his head in his coat collar to protect

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his face from the stinging blasts, the chemist followed his guide through the drifts of virgin snow down Twentieth Street to Gramercy Park West, where they mounted the decaying steps of an ugly brownstone house.

CHAPTER II

THE ANCIENT HOUSE

It was a very old and decrepit house, and one gathered the impression that it was held in place solely because of its position in the center of a row of apparently younger dwellings; though this could not have been the case since the entire row had been built at the same time and had remained untouched since. Perhaps the look of age was given by the dreariness of the place. The windows were dark, and rattled with every passing gust, and the brown, bare stems of the ivy clutched the discolored walls like a million scrawny fingers.

In the deserted street the wind was whirling the drifting snow; feebly the light on the corner struggled to pierce the enshrouding pall; in the park itself the gaunt trees shivered with a brittle sound as if the cold had frozen the sap within their veins and made them old before their time.

Hearing that melancholy sound Philip Norris shuddered and drew his coat collar closer about his neck as he watched Fordney insert a key in the lock of the grated entrance and endeavor to

turn it with numbed and frozen fingers. The thought came to the young man that it was a wild enough evening for almost anything to happen, since only evil creatures would venture abroad in such a storm. Yet he jumped when a gruff voice remarked out of the gloom:

“Come down out of that. What do you think you are up to, trying to break into an empty house.”

Peering down Norris discerned the bulky form of a policeman. Before the chemist could plausibly account for his presence, Fordney straightened and spoke.

“It’s all right, Officer. Just some one who wants to look over the premises.”

A beam of white light played for an instant over the two men on the stoop, then the policeman laughed booming.

“I didn’t recognize you, Fordney. My mistake. You wouldn’t know your own brother in this storm.”

“Beastly weather,” assented Norris, who was not feeling entirely at his ease. The sight of a policeman had a sobering influence, and raised a doubt in his mind as to the advisability of becoming entangled in his uncle’s affairs. Jonas Faraday’s name had been associated more than once with unsavory schemes.

But it was too late to back out now. Fordney had swung open the grilled door that creaked protestingly on rusted hinges and had entered the dark vestibule. Then he opened the inner door of stout oak and Norris found himself in a dim and dismal hall.

The heavy furnishings were covered with the dust of years. There was a musty odor clinging to the place as though the house were never aired. Also it was cold there, cold and decidedly unpleasant.

Norris almost fancied that ancient ghosts lifted sullen faces at this unwarranted intrusion. He hastened to follow Fordney toward the left where a small corridor branched off abruptly.

"Fordney, what did that officer mean when he called this an empty house?" Curiosity was blended with caution as Norris asked the question. He had no intention of walking into a trap.

"We only use the back, Mr. Phil," explained Fordney in a hesitant manner. "Mr. Fielding is a very rich man and he's afraid of burglars. He wants people to think that the house is unoccupied and that I'm simply the caretaker."

Norris took leave to doubt this explanation. He had jumped to the troubling conclusion that his uncle was mad. But there was no time to

discuss the matter further. They turned a corner rather sharply and found themselves up against a blank wall some six feet in width.

It was too dark to see clearly what Fordney was up to. Norris had a half-formed impression that the old servant opened the wall with a key. At any rate a section of the wall gave way before them, admitting them to another longer corridor which was lighted by a subdued glow from an overhead lamp.

But none of these things, strange as they were, occupied Norris' attention. His eye was caught and held by the full-sized portrait at the far end of this second passage.

It was the portrait of a young woman, scarcely more than a girl, and so skilfully had the artist caught the radiance of her personality that she dominated her surroundings to the exclusion of everything else.

The very way in which she lifted the wide skirt of her silk gown gave the young chemist the impression that she was about to step down from her frame to greet him. There was welcome in the curve of her red lips, in the dancing brightness of her blue eyes, in the very gesture with which she laughingly tossed back her auburn ringlets.

Norris was assailed by the absurd notion that

he really ought to speak to her. So impelling was the gaze of those sapphire eyes that for the moment they blotted out every other consideration from his mind. Forgetful of his uncle, of Fordney, of the queerness of the whole episode, Norris walked like a man in a daze through the opened wall and down the corridor toward the portrait.

“So you like my pretty doll, eh?” A high, rasping voice shattered the silence that held the young man spellbound. Again he jumped involuntarily. Then instinctively he took another step toward the portrait as if to protect the girl from some unseen menace.

As he realized how far the artist's skill had wrought upon his imagination, Norris flushed with annoyance and turned to look for Fordney. As he did so, a high, shrill cackle, prolonged and disconcerting, echoed caustically down the corridor.

CHAPTER III

THE VAULT

ANGERED by that prolonged and ugly cachinnation, Philip Norris strode down the corridor to an open doorway some five feet from the entrance wall. On the threshold, however, he paused. Prudence whispered that there was nothing to be gained by losing his temper over a portrait. Besides, he was considerably disturbed by the appearance of this uncle whom he had not seen in so many years.

In the dim firelight that wrought weird shapes upon the polished floor, the old man's figure resembled that of a great black toad as he squatted on a low stool before the hearth, his back to the door, his head sunk upon his hollow chest. Behind him his giant shadow reached out and engulfed the room.

Sensitive to the atmosphere of places, the young chemist shivered. It seemed to him that the grim spectre of death skulked in the shadows beyond the firelight. To put an end to these fanciful imaginings, Norris crossed the room and laid a hand on his uncle's shoulder.

In answer to the touch Jonas Fielding, as he called himself, looked up quickly at his nephew, then as quickly sunk his head back on his chest and continued his brooding. Norris stood motionless, relieved to find the man alive, yet shocked by a glimpse of that ruthless old countenance.

In that moment of revelation the young man knew that the conclusion he had reached on entering the house was unfounded. His uncle, whatever else he might be, was not and never had been mad.

There was a malignant gleam in the small blue eyes sunken deep in their hollow sockets; there was grim menace in the thin, bloodless lips stretched into the semblance of a grin across the wrinkled, parchment face that precluded the idea of madness and told Norris plainly that Jonas Fielding had a purpose in view in summoning him to that house.

In the crafty expression of the old man's eyes Norris read the reason for the seclusion in which his uncle dwelt. Evil emanated from him like a poisonous vapor and the wicked old fellow feared for himself. It was not at all likely that he was frightened of burglars as Fordney had intimated.

“So you came, Phil, eh? Curiosity brought

you as I knew it would. Well, what do you make of the mystery that surrounds me, eh?" The rasping voice grated on Norris' ear. There was a deal of bland self-complacency in the harsh tones.

"I make nothing of the mystery," said the chemist shortly. "I came because Forth—er Fordney, urged me. Since your only desire to see me was to laugh at me, I might as well be going." He turned on his heel as he spoke.

"I wasn't laughing at you," denied the old man, lifting his skull-like head. "For God's sake, don't abandon me, Phil!" A look of abject terror overspread the yellowed face and there was desperation in the high-pitched voice.

Norris turned back. He was essentially a kind-hearted chap. The man was, after all, his flesh and blood. He could hardly fail to respond to such an appeal. Besides, his curiosity was re-aroused by the very strangeness of the whole business.

"What do you want of me?" Norris had no intention of throwing caution to the winds.

Fear was instantly blotted out by cunning in the wrinkled face. "Downstairs I have a treasure vault," whispered the old man, beckoning the chemist closer with a bony forefinger. "I'm interested in Egyptology. I have just bought

a marvelous mummy case." His voice crooned the words. "I want you to see it. Will you come, Phil? Will you?"

Jonas Fielding rose suddenly, shakily, from his stool. His eyes were eager, pleading.

Norris nodded slowly, although he was still dubious. Just what was his uncle getting at? He did not trust Jonas Fielding. Was this talk of a mummy case simply a blind?

"Wait, Phil. We must have a light. Wait while I get a candle." The old man rubbed his dry palms together with a rasping sound as he shuffled off into the shadows.

When Jonas Fielding had disappeared, Norris profited by the opportunity to examine the room. He found the switch and turned on the overhead lights.

Then he saw that he was in an old-fashioned, walnut-panelled library furnished in exquisite taste; the neutral tint of the Oriental rugs blending harmoniously with the deep wine tones of the luxurious over-stuffed chairs. But amazing as was the richness of the room, the young man was far more astounded by the circumstance that there was only one window, long, narrow, and barred like that of a prison cell.

He went over to it and saw that it was not wide enough to admit the passage of a human

body. He put out a hand to test the bars when a voice behind him uttered a sharp exclamation.

"Don't touch them, Mr. Phil! They're wired. Come away from there, sir." Fordney's tones were edged with fear as he appeared in the doorway.

"Wired? What for?" Norris whirled toward the old servant.

"I told you, sir. He's afraid of thieves."

"Nonsense. I don't believe it. I——" Norris got no further.

With an unexpectedness that was alarming the library was plunged into darkness. Only the dying embers tried feebly to withstand the onslaught of the advancing shadows. Then from the surrounding gloom Jonas Fielding came into the circle of firelight, carrying a lighted candle in his hand.

Mechanically Norris offered to take the taper, but the old man waved him impatiently aside.

"I'm not quite useless — yet," he said and added in a lower tone, "The candle's sufficient. I won't have them spying upon me ——" Then he broke off abruptly and advanced into the darker shadows of the room.

Following closely, Norris found himself in the corridor where the lamp also had been extinguished. The beam from the candle pierced the

darkness like a golden shaft and fell presently across the face of the girl of the portrait.

Norris, who had lost his sense of direction in the dark, was surprised, but the old man only chuckled silently. He held the candle close to the bright face and smiled at the girl in a confidential manner.

"They haven't got me yet, my dear," he whispered to her with a knowing wink. "And they won't get me while you stand guard. They don't know I have a potent charm to ward them off — eh, Granya, dear. I can laugh at them in spite of their threats," and he cackled hollowly.

"Uncle!" exclaimed Norris aghast. It was like listening to the shrill mirth of a maniac. Had he been mistaken? Was his uncle insane after all?

"No, no. It was nothing. Just an old man's foolish fancy, my boy," mumbled Jonas Fielding, a sly look superseding the wildness in his eyes. "It's just a picture I bought many years ago. It is no one at all that I know. But we must hurry. It is getting late and the treasure is waiting."

Norris accepted the explanation although he did not credit it. He was fully persuaded now that the old man was mad. There was nothing to be gained by argument. He wished himself

well out of the adventure; but, having promised, he was determined to see it through to the end.

Jonas Fielding fumbled with the gilded frame for a moment and then swung it back on silent hinges, revealing a door of steel which he opened with a key that he wore about his neck on a chain. Then, holding the candle high above his head like a torch, he began to descend a flight of narrow stone steps.

Norris followed uneasily. What was this vault in which his uncle kept his valuables? The cold damp air that rose from it to greet him put him in mind of the unpleasant chill of a tomb.

What secret was buried in that stone mausoleum into which he was being taken? Was his uncle crazy enough to incarcerate them both in that dark cell?

To divert his mind from so morbid a fancy, Norris deliberately turned his thoughts upon the scene enacted the moment before in the corridor. Why did his uncle use the portrait to hide the entrance to the vault? And what was the significance of his words to the picture?

That the portrait was that of some young woman with whom his uncle was acquainted, Norris was positive. Yet what young woman could possibly think enough of that horrible old

man to make him a present of her portrait?

With a sudden shock Norris was brought back to his immediate surroundings. Jonas Fielding had reached the bottom step when suddenly a draft of air extinguished the candle, leaving them in a blackness so intense that Norris instinctively paused where he was standing.

Then because he could neither see nor hear his uncle, and he feared that harm had come to the old man, Norris put out a foot and felt cautiously for the step below. But he did not descend any further.

A wailing cry rose and fell and rose again, ringing despairingly through the impenetrable darkness below him!

CHAPTER IV

A PROMISE

FOR one interminable second Norris stood rooted to the spot, frozen to the marrow by the ghostly horror of that sound. Then he plunged swiftly down the remaining steps.

The wailing cry which had continued its doleful dirge without diminution until he moved, quivered into silence, and the unbroken stillness vibrating to the phantom of that lamentation, was far more terrible than the cry itself had been.

The chemist, numbed by the sudden cessation of that sound, had just presence of mind enough to scratch a match. His fingers trembled so that he dropped the first vesta and broke the second. With his nerves atingle, expecting momentarily to hear the wail repeated, Norris finally secured a light; but his hand was so unsteady that the flame leaped up and down like a jagged point and cast distorted shadows on the wall beside him.

In that instant, however, he had located the gas jet and he applied the flickering match with

a fervid ejaculation of relief. Then he turned fearfully, anticipating he knew not what dread sight.

The inadequate light revealed Jonas Fielding huddled against the stairs, the cabinets and boxes ranged along the bare walls. Norris hurried from object to object, peering behind boxes and underneath cabinets; but nothing unusual could he find. Except for himself and his uncle the vault was empty.

The slap, slap of Jonas Fielding's slippers as the latter came across the stone floor, chuckling to himself, made the younger man turn toward him in awe-struck amazement. Had Jonas Fielding been forewarned that he remained impervious to the horror of that cry? Had he, Norris, been brought down here to be terrorized? The thought was not to be borne.

"Uncle," he protested.

The old man chuckled slightly. "I forgot to warn you, Phil. The sixth step from the bottom gives when you put your foot on it, making contact with a device in the wall. That cry can be heard in my rooms. It's just a slight precaution that serves a double purpose; to frighten any one who may attempt an entrance through the vault, and to warn me of the approach of my enemies."

He sank his voice to a whisper and continued before Norris could interrupt, "You're all right, my boy. Weren't afraid, were you, eh?"

The young man took out his handkerchief and mopped the cold moisture from his brow. Had he been afraid? He was half inclined to admit that he had experienced a sensation akin to fear, but the feeling had given place to resentment at the trick played upon him. Before he could find an appropriate answer, Jonas Fielding grinned and changed the subject.

"We are wasting precious time, Phil. I want you to see my case." His harsh voice dropped to a caressing note as he turned toward an oblong box, some seven feet long, covered with innumerable hieroglyphics.

"Inside that box," continued the old man gloatingly, "lies the real mummy case, a gilded coffin inlaid with gems and colored glass, the resting-place of a long dead princess. The case was found in a tomb near Thebes that had escaped looting by robbers, so that the mummy is still intact."

But Norris only half-listened to this recital, thinking that his uncle looked doubly evil as his claw-like hands caressed the outer case.

Presently Jonas Fielding plucked his nephew by the sleeve. "Phil, you're not listening," he

complained. "And it's important that you should listen very attentively." He paused and glanced around furtively as though he suspected eavesdroppers, then he lowered his voice. "Phil, I want to tell you something. Promise me that you will carry out my wishes word for word as I give them to you."

Norris looked sharply at his uncle. The old man's eyes were bright and feverish and there was an expression of triumph mingled with dread in their blue depths. Again he told himself that his uncle was daft.

"Promise, Phil," Jonas Fielding begged again piteously, and to quiet him, Norris said simply, "I promise, Uncle."

"You must swear it, Phil. Swear by all you hold sacred that you will do what I ask." The harsh voice trembled with emotion and Norris found himself complying.

In broad daylight the request would have struck Norris as absurd; but here in the semi-darkness of the vault with the memory of his recent fright still distressingly vivid, the matter took on a different aspect. As one who humors the fancies of a sick child, he repeated quietly, "I swear."

The words echoed through the vault with a muffled sound. The young chemist was reminded

of that scene in "Hamlet" when the prince makes his followers swear eternal silence and the ghost booms out in answer, "Swear." It seemed to him that some one answered mockingly through the darkness, "Swear," but he knew the vault was empty and he put it down to imagination.

Jonas Fielding breathed easier when this oath was taken. He tapped his nephew on the arm. "You must listen carefully. I have enemies, Phil, many of them. I bought this case to fool them. You see, I am dying——"

"Nonsense, Uncle."

The old man grinned sardonically. "We all have to come to it sometime. But I know my end is near. I feel it. A few days more and I shall be beyond their reach. Phil, they would kill me if they could."

"Who, Uncle?" Norris spoke soothingly. He was convinced that he was listening to the ravings of a mind unbalanced.

Jonas Fielding looked fearfully around again. "My enemies. I can't tell you who they are. But they want to kill me. They have wanted to these five years, and they haven't been able to carry out their desire because I was too clever for them. I, Jonas T. Faraday, have lived here as Jonas Fielding all these years under their

very noses and they have not been able to reach me. They want to kill me, but I shall die in peace in spite of them." His voice rose to a shrill note of triumph that sent a shiver down Norris' spine.

What a horrible delusion this fixed idea of his uncle's was. The chemist cast about for some means to distract the old man's attention, but the latter was not to be diverted from his intention. With the air of a conspirator, he sidled closer. "If you bury me, they will try to get my body. But I'll cheat them yet. That is why I bought this case with the coffin inside. I care nothing for its beauty; nothing for the creature that lies within. It was to save myself I bought it."

"Yes, Uncle Jonas. And now that you have told me this, let's return upstairs. This place is frightfully cold." Norris spoke impatiently.

Jonas Fielding shook his gray head. "You think I am mad. I'm more sane than you are, Phil. And I have only just begun." He fumbled in the pocket of his dressing gown and produced a small vial containing a colorless fluid. "The secret of the embalming fluid of the ancient Pharaoh," he whispered in an exultant tone, holding the vial up to the light. "I got it from an old man when I was in Egypt fifteen years ago." He pressed the vial upon his nephew.

"You are a chemist. You will know how to use this. Your nerves are steady. You will not shrink from the task. When Fordney tells you that I am dead, you must come here alone and embalm me and put me in that case. Bury the mummy in my place and then seal up this vault. You have sworn, Phil."

Mounting horror prevented Norris from answering and the old man went on to curse his enemies. Beneath the intensity of the cracked voice that spat such venom, the young man continued silent, unable to find words with which to stem the torrent of vituperation.

With a last vicious denunciation, the old man turned upon his nephew with upraised arms. "And you," he shrieked wildly in his fury, "remember you have sworn. If you dare to fail me, death and destruction will fall upon you and those you love."

Threats against himself, Norris could cope with. "Oh, come, Uncle," he exclaimed impatiently for the scene had got on his nerves. "A truce to such nonsense. I'll do as you ask. And now let us go back upstairs. I've got to get home, you know."

Jonas Fielding's withered countenance changed instantly from a mask of hatred to one of smiling benignity — if such a term could be used in

conjunction with so much wickedness. But he did not change without a supreme effort of the will. He was still breathing fast and his bony hands were trembling as he went on, "Just one minute, Phil. Will you do me one more favor?"

"Well?" Norris' voice was uncompromising. He was suspicious of that seraphic smile.

"I may not be able to come down those steps again. I want to see that everything is in order with regard to the mummy case. I tried to open it this morning but the lock is caught in some way. Will you open the lid of the outer case for me, please?"

Having humored the old man in entering the vault at all, Norris decided that it would be foolish to refuse this last harmless request. He stepped to the wooden box and examined the fastening. To his surprise he saw an up-to-date key-hole bored in the ancient wood.

"That's queer," he thought. "It's locked, Uncle. Have you got the key?"

"Key?" mumbled the old man. "It doesn't need a key. It's just caught."

Norris cast about rapidly in search of help. On the top of one of the cabinets was a long, flat strip of bronze. It looked like a ferule and was covered with hieroglyphics. The value of the curio did not in the least deter the young man.

He secured the instrument and inserted one end under the lid of the case just above the lock.

There was a sound of straining, groaning wood and Jonas Fielding moaned in sympathy. "Do be careful, Phil," he cried in an agony of suspense.

Norris paid no heed to his uncle. He was intent upon his task, so intent in fact that he failed to detect the slight sound behind him until it was too late.

The next instant the light had been extinguished and he turned sharply to find himself pinioned by a pair of strong arms. He was dimly aware that he raised the bronze ferule in self-defence and struck home once before a smashing blow sent him reeling back against the wooden case. He tried to save himself but in the pitch blackness he tripped and fell, striking his head against a sharp corner. Unconsciousness mercifully blotted out the pain.

CHAPTER V

“ WITH THE SAME MEASURE THAT YE METE ”

WHEN Norris finally opened his eyes, he was sensible only of a dull throb in the back of his head. Gingerly he felt the unnatural swelling that assumed the proportions of a hen's egg to his inexperienced touch as he tried to account for his undignified position on the cold stone floor of the vault. Gradually, out of the confused mass of his thoughts, the events of the past hour took definite shape before his mind.

He had been attacked, and in the dark he had defended himself against his unknown assailant. The proof of that latter assumption remained in his hand. He was still grasping the bronze ferule as though his very life depended on it.

Well, it was a good weapon to have in case of need. His antagonist might be waiting to rush him again. He had no idea how long he had remained unconscious; perhaps only a minute or two. His enemy might be skulking in the dark, ready to pounce at the first opportunity.

Cautiously Norris raised himself to a sitting posture and listened intently for some sound

that would betray the other's position. But only his own quickened breathing disturbed the eerie silence of the vault. He strained his eyes but could not even distinguish the boxes and cabinets that he knew should be ranged about the walls.

Then came another thought. Who was this enemy? And how had he obtained entrance to the vault? Was he one of those whom his uncle feared, or had Jonas Fielding himself admitted this man into his treasure chamber?

The first supposition was doubtless the true one since the wary old man was hardly likely to reveal the secret of his seclusion except under compulsion. But in that event, where was his uncle? Had Jonas Fielding fled at the first intimation of danger, leaving his nephew to bear the brunt of the attack?

The wave of resentment that swept over Norris at the thought carried him to his feet and sent him groping through the dark toward the gas jet, regardless of peril to himself. But nothing untoward occurred. Not a sound broke the heavy stillness that enveloped him and he was forced to the conclusion that the vault was empty.

Swiftly he struck a match and secured a light; then he turned and surveyed the room. As far

as he could tell in the feeble illumination, nothing had been disturbed. If robbery had been the motive for the intrusion, his assailant had departed empty-handed. Even the big oblong box that his uncle had purchased to use as a coffin was apparently untouched, unless indeed the inside mummy case had been removed.

Norris crossed the vault and approached the outer case. One glance assured him that it was still locked, but he wasted no time in further investigation. That same glance had showed him something else in the shadows beyond the case, a dark splotch that resolved itself into a human figure as he advanced upon it. In another moment, with a startled exclamation, he was bending over the body of his uncle.

Murder has a horrifying effect, however despicable the victim. Though Norris was conscious of no particular feeling of grief at the death of Jonas Fielding, yet the manner of that death held him stupefied for a moment or two before he roused himself to learn what he could of the tragedy. Being an amateur at this sort of game, Norris' observations were purely superficial.

Jonas Fielding was lying on his back, his wizened face pointed starkly toward the ceiling, his bony hands clutched convulsively at his side,

his staring eyes protruding from their sockets as though he had gazed in terror on his murderer. His dressing-gown had been wrenched open and above the stained white shirt projected a silver ring, the handle of a dagger. Below this ring was pinned a piece of paper on which had been inscribed in a large, unformed hand,

“With the same measure that ye mete, it shall be measured to you again.”

Norris recognized the quotation as coming from the Bible and he wondered vaguely to which of his uncle's many shady schemes the words referred. He was a good deal more intrigued by the pin that held the paper, a gold scarf pin whose head was formed of three tiny hands joined in friendship's clasp. Around the rim was graven the motto, “Bona Fides.”

Norris put out his hand to take the pin when the thought occurred that this was a case of murder and that he were wiser to leave things just as he had found them. Besides, murder was a matter for the police. What was he thinking about, standing around as though there were nothing to be done. While he investigated, the murderer was making good his escape.

This idea engendered the question, how had this man made his escape? Had he gone out

through the front door? If so, why had not Fordney stopped him?

Norris crossed the vault, ran up the stone steps and along the dark corridor. At the end of the passage he ran into the blank wall with a sense of surprise. He had forgotten the means used to effect an entrance into his uncle's stronghold. Loudly he called the old servant. Silence — and in the pregnant darkness voices that whispered of the possibility of another tragedy. The young chemist called again sharply, insistently.

"What is it? Did you call, sir?" came in the wavering voice of Fordney as from a great distance.

"Turn on the light," Norris exclaimed peremptorily. The darkness had become oppressive.

A click and the corridor was once more illumined by that soft, subdued glow. Norris spoke curtly. "Where have you been?"

Fordney looked at the chemist in wide-eyed amazement. "In my room, Mr. Phil. On the second floor, sir. But what's wrong. You're white to the lips." He uttered a faint cry. "He hasn't killed himself, Mr. Phil?"

Norris made tight-lipped answer. "No, but some one else has. He's been murdered. Didn't you hear any sounds, any cries for help?"

“No, sir. Not a sound. But, Mr. Phil,” hesitantly, “couldn’t you have prevented it? You were with Mr. Fielding.”

Norris laughed grimly, although he was in no mood for laughter. “Prevented it? When I was stretched out unconscious on the floor?”

“Mr. Phil, sir.” Fordney was shocked. “But who could have done it, sir?”

Norris sobered instantly. “Just what I was about to ask you. Who are these enemies that Uncle Jonas mentioned?”

Fordney made a helpless gesture. “I don’t know, Mr. Phil. He never told me anything.”

“Could any one have left this house without your knowledge, Fordney?”

“No, sir. There is only one key that unlocks the wall. It has never left my possession, sir.”

“Keys can be duplicated.”

“But it is impossible for any one to find the lock, sir. It’s too cleverly concealed.”

“Hum. Well, I’m going for the police.” The word had carried with it an image of a bulky form in blue that had challenged Norris out of the storm. “It’s up to them to discover the truth. Open this wall and leave it open.”

Fordney inserted a key in the skilfully hidden lock. As he swung open the door, he added, “Mr. Phil, no one could have passed through

this door. There is a device connected with it, sir, to warn us of danger. Like the step in the vault."

"It's possible then to disconnect this device?" inquired Norris, for the door had opened noiselessly.

"Yes, sir. By moving the key upwards and slightly to the left, sir. But no one but myself would know how to do it."

"As I said before, it's up to the police. Go down to the vault and keep watch over Uncle Jonas. For anything we know to the contrary, the murderer may still be in the house."

Reluctantly Fordney obeyed. Norris watched him out of sight, then he hurried down the smaller corridor and across the entrance hall where he secured his overcoat and hat. Swinging open the heavy front door, he stepped out into the storm. Under the rays of the arc light on the corner, he discovered the policeman he was seeking.

The latter was engaged in giving directions to a slender young woman wrapped in a heavy fur coat, for as Norris approached he heard the policeman remark, "Two to your left. If you keep close to the houses on this block, you can't go far wrong, even in this storm."

The young woman thanked him and moved

away just as Norris reached the outer rays of the lamp. He was too taken up with his own affairs to wonder whether he might not be of service to her, as he would assuredly have done under more auspicious circumstances. Instead he poured out a strange tale that made Officer Gordon open his eyes wide in astonishment.

“You must be mistaken, sir. That house is empty,” exclaimed the upholder of the law.

Norris negatived the suggestion. “I’m not mistaken, Officer. Perhaps my name will convince you of the veracity of my story. I am Philip Norris, experimental chemist. I have been doing some work for the government lately. You have probably seen my name in the papers recently.”

Gordon’s manner changed subtly, became deferential. “Yes, Mr. Norris, but,” here he looked perplexed and shook his head as he followed the young man toward the house, “I’ve been on this beat for months and beyond the old man who looks after it, that house is empty.” He voiced a sudden suspicion. “Didn’t Fordney say he took you in to look over the premises?”

“A ruse on Fordney’s part to get rid of you. Look here,” Norris said, annoyed, “I know nothing about the place except what I am telling

you. My uncle lived in the back part behind bolts and bars and now he has been murdered. The rest is up to you."

The policeman entered the house and tramped along the dim hall in silence. Once or twice he stole a sharp glance at the young man, a glance that Norris intercepted as he led the way through the open door in the wall.

"Humph," the chemist mentally ejaculated, "he thinks I'm playing a joke upon him. He doesn't want to be made a fool of; yet he is not averse to getting in out of the storm on any pretext."

When they reached the entrance to the vault, Norris descended first, cautioning the policeman to avoid the trick step. The latter grunted and followed lumberingly.

Near the body of Jonas Fielding, Fordney was standing guard, the bronze ferule in his bony hand. Impassively Gordon studied the situation. Presently he turned to Norris and addressed him:

"Doesn't seem to be any entrance to this place but the door above. You say yourself that no one could have come in that way. Sure you didn't dream that some one hit you. You may have tripped of your own accord." He lowered his voice, "Or that the some one who

attacked you wasn't ——" and he jerked his big blond head in Fordney's direction.

"Nonsense," returned Norris quickly. "Why should he? Besides, I wasn't dreaming. The man who attacked me was a powerful fellow. More your build than Fordney's." His eye alighted on the ferule. He started and took the weapon unceremoniously from Fordney's weak grasp.

"Here's proof that it was no nightmare encounter, Officer," Norris exclaimed. "I seem to have made some slight impression on the fellow. Look here."

He beckoned the policeman to the light and pointed to the edge of the ferule. The bright surface of the metal was clouded here and there by what looked like a brown film.

"This strip is fairly sharp," continued Norris. "I must have wounded him on the shoulder. Much the same effect as though I had gashed him with a knife. As far as I could judge in the dark, he wore no coat."

Again the policeman grunted and eyed Fordney's thin figure disapprovingly. "I guess it's a job for Headquarters, sir. Is there a telephone in the house?"

Fordney answered, "No, sir. Mr. Fielding refused to have one installed."

“ There’s a drug store on the corner above this one,” remarked Gordon dispassionately. “ Might I ask you to call Headquarters, sir. I’ll have to stay here to see that nothing’s touched.”

CHAPTER VI

SERGEANT WILLIAMS ASSUMES COMMAND

As Norris battled his way through the whirling snow toward the drug store, his mind occupied itself with the details of the murder. He had said that the discovery of the truth relating to the crime rested with the police. Nevertheless, he could not help attempting to solve the problem for himself.

In the first place, what had been the motive for the crime? From the quotation on the paper pinned to his uncle's breast, Norris deduced logically that the murder was one of retribution. Nor was this idea incongruous with what he knew of his uncle's reputation, and of the fact that the old man had evidently lived in fear of just such a tragedy.

Then the crime was the work of an enemy. His uncle had spoken of enemies. Which one was responsible for the ghastly deed? Norris could not answer that question, since he had no intimate knowledge of his uncle's affairs.

How had the murderer entered and escaped from the house? At this point Norris stopped

short and clapped his hand to his head like a person who has just made an important discovery.

“What an idiot I am,” he groaned inaudibly. “The murderer must have been hiding in the house when I left to summon Gordon. I had every door wide open while I was out of the house, and Fordney was in the vault, too far away to notice anything unusual. All the criminal had to do was to walk out and disappear into the storm, thanks to my stupidity.”

He hurried on again, eager to turn the case over to competent hands, disgusted with himself for the blunder he had committed. When he reached the drug store, however, he was forced to wait. Some one was in possession of the only telephone booth the pharmacy boasted.

As Norris waited, impatiently drumming his fingers on the glass top of the prescription counter, he was startled by the touch of a hand on his arm. He whirled abruptly to confront a tall, gaunt man — quite evidently the gentleman — whose dark eyes smouldered fiercely from out a thin, chalk-like face.

Norris noted the fur-lined overcoat, the well brushed fedora set a bit rakishly on the fine white head, the chaste blood-stone ring on a long, thin finger, the expensive cigar in the

stranger's hand before he realized that the man was addressing him for the second time.

"I beg your pardon, but I believe you dropped this purse a moment ——" The rest of the sentence was cut short by a sudden fit of coughing.

When the man recovered his breath, he held out toward Norris a flat, leather wallet which the latter recognized as his property. Dumbfoundedly Norris accepted the wallet. How on earth had he come to drop it? Was it possible that he had slipped it inside his coat instead of his inner pocket, when he had removed it to extract a bill to make change for his telephone call? He lifted his eyes from the purse to thank the stranger, but the latter was already walking out of the store.

Norris turned to the elderly druggist who had been watching the scene with keen interest. "Who is he?" Norris inquired.

"That's Arlita Farrell's father. You've heard of her, haven't you?"

Norris assented. "Hirshkoff's find? The girl who danced her way to fame in Paris several years ago and then signed up for the stellar rôle in Hirshkoff's latest musical comedy? So that's her father?"

"Yes. They live near here in Gramercy

Park. He comes in often to buy cigars and pass the time of day. He's a fine old chap. Proud as can be of his daughter's success."

"What's wrong with him? He looks frail and somewhat consumptive to me," Norris added, for the man had interested him.

"I don't know. He's had that cough since I've known him. Some day it will be the death of him. He won't take care of himself. Goes out at all hours, in good weather and bad."

The druggist turned away to wait on a customer and Norris walked over to the telephone booth. It was about time, he thought, and paused. The door was closed but the booth was empty. Strange that he hadn't noticed the occupant leave.

He pulled open the door and stepped back hastily in profound amazement. Crouched on the floor of the booth was a young woman, scarcely more than a girl, who stared up at him with quivering lips and wide, terrified blue eyes. From beneath a sable toque straggled limp bronze curls; she was clutching her fur coat closely about her with a slender white hand and the light from the booth fell directly upon the ring she was wearing, three tiny gold hands joined in friendship's clasp.

Norris started, but before he could utter a

word, she had jumped up and sprung past him. By the time that he had collected his senses sufficiently to follow, she had vanished into the night and storm.

Bewildered and perturbed, Norris slowly returned to the booth and communicated with police headquarters. The action was purely mechanical on his part. Somehow he had lost interest in the tragedy of the earlier evening. His uncle's death meant nothing in particular to Norris, beyond the natural desire to discover the murderer. He was far more intrigued by the mystery of the girl.

Why had she hidden in the telephone booth? Was it because she had seen him coming toward her? Surely he was not one to inspire terror in a young girl. Or was it because she had feared to be recognized? Somewhere he had seen that girl before.

Norris scorned to question the druggist although he saw the latter regarding him with curious eyes. He left the drug store and headed for his uncle's house.

Who was she? He was tantalized by the knowledge that he had seen her before and quite recently, that very day, in fact. He recalled that her coat was sable, the only fur besides ermine and squirrel that he knew at a

glance, because his mother wore one. Then suddenly he had it. That fur coat. She was the young woman that Gordon was directing when he had summoned the policeman to his uncle's house.

Norris shook his head irritably, teased by a subtle memory. He was only partly on the right scent. He had noticed the coat, yes, but he had not seen her face on that occasion. Yet he was positive that her face too was familiar to him. Sapphire eyes and auburn ringlets. Where had he encountered that combination before?

He had entered the gloomy old house and passed through the door in the wall when, quick as a flash, the truth came home to him. It was her portrait that stood at the end of the corridor, guarding the entrance to the vault!

So she knew his uncle. And his uncle had been recently murdered. More, she was wearing a ring whose symbology was identical with that of the pin with which the paper had been fastened to his uncle's breast. Could it be possible ——

Nonsense. What an absurd idea. That lovely girl commit murder? As soon suspect himself.

Then why had she been so terrified? And what was she doing out alone in that storm so

near the scene of the crime? Did she, too, live in the neighborhood, like Arlita Farrell and her father? But, if such were the case, she could have phoned as well from her own home.

Such idle conjectures were endless. Norris turned his thoughts in another direction. He'd give a lot to know just what her connection with his uncle had been, and why she had given the old man her portrait.

When he reached the vault door, Norris paused. He would have another look at the portrait to make certain that he was not mistaken. In order to do so, he would have to close the vault door and swing the heavy gold frame containing the painting into place again. He had barely laid his hand on the heavy steel portal when Officer Gordon called to him from the vault.

So peculiar was the intonation of that phlegmatic voice that Norris hastened to answer the summons, wondering what new discovery had been made. In the poor light Norris saw that the policeman was bending over the body of Jonas Fielding. As he approached, Gordon spoke excitedly, "Look here, Mr. Norris. What do you think of this evidence?"

Norris stooped and looked where the policeman was pointing. The old man's dressing-

gown had been cut at the shoulder by some sharp instrument that had gashed the flesh beneath as well. "Don't you see, Mr. Norris," whispered the policeman. "It was him you wounded. It was him put out the light and attacked you. There wasn't any one else in here but you two."

"Good heavens," ejaculated Norris helplessly. His brain was in a whirl. He would not have believed such a thing possible, had he not seen the evidence with his own eyes. Still there must have been some one else in the vault; some one who had eventually killed Jonas Fielding — unless the old man had committed suicide with the intention to incriminate ——

The unpleasant thought was interrupted by a loud pounding at the front door. The delegation from the Central Office had arrived. Norris sent the silent, watchful Fordney to admit them. Presently there was the sound of a deep rumbling voice and of heavy steps on the bare flooring.

"It's Sergeant Williams," muttered Gordon in an aside to Norris as a thick-set, broad-faced man with shrewd, bright eyes and a pendulous jowl set foot on the stone steps.

Norris called out a warning and the sergeant paused in his majestic descent. He favored the young chemist with a frowning glance.

“What kind of a song and dance is this you’re giving me?” the detective demanded suspiciously.

Norris instantly conceived a dislike of the man for doubting his word. He shrugged. “If you don’t believe me, try walking on the sixth step from the bottom and perhaps you will be convinced.”

Williams grunted; put out a tentative foot, let it rest heavily on the stone tread. Immediately there arose through the somber stillness a wailing cry — to be choked off abruptly by the swift removal of the sergeant’s boot.

“Freeman,” he boomed peremptorily.

A rubicund, rosy-cheeked little man, who looked more like a prosperous grocer than a plain-clothesman, appeared from behind the sergeant’s broad back and saluted.

“Open up that step and see what’s responsible for making that infernal noise,” commanded Williams.

“I’ll have to get a pick, sir ——”

“Well — get it then,” interrupted his superior testily.

Freeman vanished along the passage. Williams continued his descent. When he reached the vault floor, he crossed to the place where Norris and the policeman were standing. As he

caught the sergeant's eye, Gordon saluted, and asked for permission to return to his neglected duties.

"I'm supposed to be on my beat until eight, sir," he added.

"What were you doing here in the first place?" demanded Williams.

"Mr. Norris called me in, sir, when he discovered the murder," answered Gordon.

Williams nodded a dismissal. "All right, you can go. I'll get your evidence later."

Gordon tramped away and Williams resumed his official manner. He began at once an exhaustive examination of the body of Jonas Fielding.

In scornful silence Norris watched the detective finger the silver ring in the old man's breast, purse his lips over the wound on the shoulder, and frown meditatively over the quotation on the paper. If Williams noticed the look on Norris' face, he gave no sign of it. Impassively he continued his task of collecting his evidence.

Presently, he unpinned the paper, looked carefully at the gold scarf pin, and put both articles away in a capacious pocket for future reference. Then he turned to Norris and demanded a full account of the tragedy.

CHAPTER VII

THE FACE OF THE PORTRAIT

NORRIS complied with the sergeant's request readily enough, relating the events which led up to the tragedy briefly, dwelling more particularly on the murder and his subsequent actions; omitting, however, one detail, his encounter with the girl of the portrait. For some reason that he did not at the moment stop to analyze, Norris could not bring himself to speak of her to the police.

Williams heard Norris through without comment. At the conclusion of the recital, he took up the bronze ferule, examined it minutely, and then applied it to the wound in Jonas Fielding's shoulder.

"Hump," the detective remarked presently. "I guess you're right. What made him attack you?"

"I don't know," replied Norris in a troubled voice. "I can't understand his motive at all."

"You hadn't said something to anger him, for instance?"

"Not a thing. I was simply complying with his wishes in every respect, even against my own

better judgment." Norris laid his hand on the wooden case. "As I told you, my uncle expressed the desire to be buried in the mummy case inside this box. He asked me as a favor to open the box for him. As there was no key, I was trying to force the lock with that ferule, when the light went out and I felt myself attacked. I had no idea that my assailant was Uncle Jonas, and naturally I struck back in self-defence."

"In other words, your uncle asked you to open the box, and then when you complied he prevented you from doing so by grappling with you." There was a trace of irony in the deep tones.

Norris stirred uneasily. "I know it sounds absurd, but it is the truth, and the only account I can give of the occurrence," he returned with quiet dignity.

Williams said nothing. He removed a bunch of keys from his pocket and tried them on the lock. Presently he found one that suited his purpose and he flung back the lid of the box. To Norris' profound astonishment, the receptacle was empty.

Williams glanced suspiciously at the younger man. "A mummy case did you say, Mr. Norris?" he inquired with heavy sarcasm.

"I can only repeat what my uncle told me. Remember that I did not succeed in opening the box." Norris felt the impulse to defend himself under the searching fire of the detective's glance. He sensed that he was rather close to the danger line.

It was at this critical juncture that a shout from the corridor distracted Williams' attention and put an end to the cross-examination. A second plain-clothesman, the antithesis of Freeman, tall, thin, dark, appeared at the head of the steps.

"Quick, Sergeant," he called. "The old servant —— Good God, what a house."

Norris was the first to move. He fairly flew up the steps and down the corridor. At the door of the library he paused. The room was brilliantly illuminated. On the floor beneath the one barred window lay the crumpled form of the man who had served Jonas Fielding faithfully for so many years.

At the sight, Norris exclaimed aloud and knelt down beside the inert figure. He did not need to be told what had happened. He could easily guess. He lifted a limp, burned hand and let it drop listlessly.

He recalled the days when Fordney used to accompany Jonas Fielding to the Norris' home,

how kind the old fellow had always been to him, and he buried his face in his hands.

Williams, following more leisurely, took in the beautiful old room, the evidences of wealth so at variance with the front of the house, the indications of culture, the barred window, the still figure and the unstrung young chemist. He whistled softly with raised eyebrows, then he spoke to his subordinate.

“What happened?” he asked dispassionately.

“I was searching this room and spotted that window. It looked queer to me, barred like that, and I went over to have a look at it.” Daniels’ voice shook and he paused to regain control of himself.

“The old fellow was over there,” he went on presently. “Suddenly he jumped on me and pushed me away. I thought he was trying to put something over on me so I gave him a jab to get him out of my way. He fell back and his hand grazed the bars, and he dropped like a log. My God, don’t touch them, sir. They’re wired,” he cried out as Williams approached the window. He had been very close to death, this man, and he could not easily forget the horror of it.

Williams inspected the bars from a safe distance. Wired were they? For what reason?

"Is there any one else in this house, Daniels?"

"No, sir. I've searched the place thoroughly. The front part of the house has been unused for years. The whole place is thick with dust."

Williams frowned with annoyance. The servant, then, was the only one that could give information about the murdered man. Now, to make a bad matter worse, he had stupidly got himself killed.

As if to give the lie to Williams' thought of him, Fordney stirred and groaned feebly. Instantly the detective became a man of action.

"Send for an ambulance, Daniels, and have him taken to Bellevue." Williams paused. Through the empty house reverberated the hollow sound of knocking. "That's probably Morehouse. Admit him and send him down to the vault."

Williams turned on his heel and left the room. A moment Norris remained undecided whether to stay with Fordney or go with Williams. Realizing that he could do nothing for the old servant, Norris permitted his interest in the tragedy to outbalance his grief. It was to his advantage to learn all he could concerning the murder.

He had hardly descended the vault steps when Daniels admitted a tall, distinguished man who

bore the unmistakable air of a police surgeon. Williams greeted the medical examiner and introduced him rather pompously to Norris.

Morehouse, who was a genial sort and something of a chemist, instantly engaged Norris in conversation regarding one of the latter's recent experiments until Williams rather curtly reminded the surgeon that a certain duty lay before him.

With a comical lift of the eyebrows Morehouse dismounted his hobby and set to work at his task. Presently he addressed Williams.

"What did you make of this weapon, Sergeant?"

"It looked to me like the head of a skewer," answered Williams bluntly. "Never saw one made of silver before, though."

Morehouse nodded thoughtfully. Inserting a finger in the ring, he pulled out the instrument of death. It came away dripping with blood, in shape like a skewer but made of silver and sharpened to a fine point.

After a close scrutiny Morehouse passed the weapon to Williams who examined the ring attentively. Norris, peering over the detective's shoulder, saw that there were some marks scratched upon the circumference, but he could not determine their meaning.

Williams mulled over the dagger a few moments in silence. "A queer weapon to choose." He jerked a thick thumb upwards. "Do you suppose the servant killed his master? He'd have skewers handy if any one would."

Norris took umbrage at the unfounded assumption. "Forthright has served my uncle faithfully for years," he remarked coldly. "Why should he suddenly want to kill him?"

"You never can tell. I've known cases where servants have held a grudge for years." Williams gazed at the chemist's vexed countenance cogitatively. "What did you mean by calling him Forthright? He told me himself that his name was Fordney."

Norris realized that in allowing himself to imagine that the detective was stupid, he had blundered badly. "My uncle's whims were laws to his servant. He called himself Fordney because my uncle asked him to," he answered.

"You're pretty gullible, Mr. Norris. When a man changes his name, there's more than a whim behind it. Don't forget that."

Norris permitted the discussion to drop. He had no intention of telling Williams that his answer had been prompted by the desire to shield Fordney. Let the detective think him gullible if he wanted to.

Morehouse broke the ensuing silence. "I'm afraid my testimony will be rather brief. Mr. Fielding died instantly from the thrust. He's not been dead more than half an hour to an hour. From the look in his eyes, I'd be inclined to say that he died in mortal terror of somebody or something."

With a grunt Williams pocketed the weapon, just as Freeman appeared at the head of the steps with a pick slung over one shoulder.

"The ambulance is here, sir," he remarked as he set to work to demolish the sixth step.

Williams gave Morehouse a brief account of the accident and asked him to accompany Fordney to the hospital. Morehouse nodded and left the vault.

By this time Freeman had dislodged the tread which proved to be made of wood but finished to resemble stone. Fastened to the tread was an armature which the slightest pressure on the step brought into contact with an electro-magnet concealed in the cavity beneath. The current thus generated was carried through wires to an apparatus in the wall which had produced the strange cry that Norris had heard.

When Williams had satisfied himself concerning the device, he invited Norris to accompany him to the library.

"Sit down, Mr. Norris. I want to ask you some questions. First of all let's have everything you know about this uncle of yours."

Norris dropped wearily into an arm-chair. Now that the tension had relaxed somewhat, he appreciated how tired he was. He raised somber eyes to the detective.

"To begin with his name was Jonas T. Faraday and he was my mother's brother. My recollection of him is hazy. He visited us once or twice when I was a youngster and he brought Forthright with him. In later years Mother never used to mention him especially, but I gathered the impression that Uncle Jonas was a rich man, as you can see for yourself from this room and the treasure downstairs."

"By the way, are those things in the vault really valuable?" inquired Williams.

"They are worth a small fortune. That stuff is almost all Egyptian," exclaimed Norris, amazed at the detective's ignorance, since he, who was no connoisseur, recognized their true value.

Williams lifted his broad shoulders. "I see so much fake stuff, you know. Evidently robbery was not the motive for the crime. But go on with your story. It's growing late."

"There isn't much more. My mother heard

of him last about fifteen years ago, I think. I assumed naturally that he was dead. He told me himself that he had been living in this house for five years."

"Why?"

Norris hesitated, then continued frankly, "I really don't know, though I can guess pretty well. One should not speak ill of the dead, particularly of one's relatives, but my uncle was not above carrying on dishonorable transactions — in a business way. I know that he had enemies — more than one — of whom he stood in mortal fear, because he repeated over and over, 'They want to kill me, Phil.'"

"Whom did he mean by 'they'?"

"He refused to tell me."

Williams eyed the chemist curiously. "It's no go, Mr. Norris. You can't put me off the track by any such ambiguous evidence. You know more than you're telling and I'm here to find out who killed your uncle."

Norris flushed angrily at the implication, the more so that there flashed into his mind the significant fact that the girl of the portrait had been wearing that peculiar ring. Even so, Williams had no right to address him in that fashion.

Norris rose and walked to the door. He did not want to quarrel, for after all the detective

was only doing his duty, albeit a trifle crudely, and Norris knew that he could not trust himself to speak dispassionately.

Williams, though he might be crude, was by no means a fool. He saw that he had gone too far and that by affronting the chemist's self-esteem, he had alienated the young man to such an extent that the chance of learning anything further from him would be slight.

The detective went over to Norris and placed a deprecating hand on the latter's arm. "I was only chafing you, Mr. Norris. Anything at all that you can tell me will be most humbly appreciated," he said with an elephantine attempt at lightness.

Norris was sensitive but he was also as quick to forgive as he was to take offense. He returned to his chair mollified.

A flock of questions fluttered through his brain and he broke out impetuously, "It seems to me, Sergeant, that you're overlooking the one real clue in the whole weird business. Who owns the scarf pin that was used to fasten the paper?"

"I'd hardly call it the one real clue," amended Williams. "There is nothing significant about it to show that it did not belong to your uncle. The dagger, too, may have been his. I'm more interested in learning why your uncle attacked

you and what he meant by saying there was a mummy case in that wooden box."

Norris was thinking, "And I should like to know why that young girl was so intimate with my uncle."

Williams continued, "I shouldn't be at all surprised to learn that the servant killed his master, or, if he did not commit the actual murder, Fordney was an accessory and that accident is simply a dodge to avert suspicion and avoid answering questions at the inquest. But I'm not going to let him get away with it. When he leaves the hospital, Daniels goes with him."

Norris was amused at the self-importance of the man at the same time that he was indignant over the accusation. "Fordney knows nothing of my uncle's death. The accident is bona fide and it may happen that Fordney will not recover. What then?"

"I have more than one string to my bow. There is your uncle's past life to look up. And there is the dealer who sold the case. By the way, what did you say his name was?"

Norris avoided the trap. "I didn't say. My uncle mentioned the name to me when he was talking about the case. It's a queer, foreign name. Kasti — Kasta ——"

“Kastamuni?” suggested Williams.

“That’s it. Do you know him?”

“I’ve heard of him. He has a place on Fifth Avenue. He’ll have to explain what he meant by selling the box under false pretenses. They are all in it. The dealer, the servant, and the murderer. But before I’m through they’re going to tell me what they know. Somebody admitted the man who killed your uncle.”

Norris, looking at the massive face with its pugnacious jaw, was thankful that he was not numbered among the suspects, although he had the feeling that even he was not immune.

“It hasn’t occurred to him as a fact yet. I’d better go before he decides to arrest me on suspicion.” Norris rose. “If that is all,” he said perfunctorily, “I might as well be going.”

“Just a moment. Where is the key to the vault door?” Williams stepped out into the corridor and approached the big steel portal.

“Uncle Jonas had it on a chain around his neck,” answered Norris.

“It’s not there now. I searched him thoroughly.” Williams swung the door to. “I wanted to lock the vault ——” He broke off to stare at the back of the picture frame. “What’s this?”

“A portrait that my uncle used to hide the

entrance. I don't know who it is," responded Norris reluctantly.

Williams turned the frame and swung it into place. Norris, eager for another glimpse of that perfect face, stepped forward. Then he paused in bewilderment.

The beautiful face had been scratched and scored beyond all recognition.

CHAPTER VIII

A FRIEND IN NEED

WILLIAMS, unmoved by the surprising occurrence, as became a police officer who had had long acquaintance with the devious ways of criminals, passed a thick thumb over the marred surface of the canvas.

“Been cut with a sharp knife,” he stated bluntly. He continued to study the mutilated portrait with judicious eyes. “Whoever ruined that picture was mighty anxious to keep us from recognizing the original,” he added after a slight pause. “I wonder who she might have been. The old man’s wife, do you think?”

Norris had been staring at the picture in a daze of noncomprehension, stunned by the act of vandalism. At the detective’s question, he flung out his slender hands in a gesture of repugnance.

“No, certainly she isn’t his wife,” he replied curtly, eyeing Williams with unconcealed disfavor. As a matter of fact there was no certainty about the question. He could not have told what made him reject the proposition with such violence.

"Your uncle was a bachelor, then?" inquired Williams, swinging the frame around to study the back of the canvas.

"I haven't the remotest idea."

"Then how can you state so confidently that this painting is not a picture of his wife?"

Norris passed his fingers nervously through his thick hair. He had to admit in all justice that Williams had logic on his side. "I can't be positive, of course," he returned irritably. "I know she wasn't and that is good enough for me."

Williams laughed, Gargantuanly good-humored. "You're young, Mr. Norris, and you don't like to think of youth mated with age. But it's done quite often I assure you, and it was done in this case, too. Just look here. This is proof enough for me." He pointed to some faint pencil marks on the back of the canvas.

Norris stepped closer and with difficulty deciphered the phrase "For my husband," and below it the name "Granya."

He recalled swiftly his uncle's words to the portrait before their descent to the vault. The old man had spoken almost tenderly. Norris' thoughts fled to the girl as he had seen her crouching in the telephone booth. He would

never believe that she was his uncle's wife in spite of the evidence of the portrait. If she had been — why hadn't Fordney mentioned her? Why had she fled from the house? Or had she been responsible in some way for the murder of his uncle?

The whole thing was a nightmare horror, a web of tangled facts that he could not unravel alone. The gloom of the old house was responsible for his state of mind. Once he got away from the place he would be able to think clearly again.

He glanced at his wrist watch, murmured something about being late for dinner, wished Williams good-evening, and hurried away.

"Just a moment," exclaimed Williams, caught unawares by this hasty retreat, but Norris pretended not to have heard. He was anxious to get away. He passed through the door in the wall, crossed the dark corridor to the hall and secured his hat and coat. Then he waited for Williams to catch up with him. He had remembered that the detective knew nothing of the hidden lock on the door.

"Better leave the door in the wall open, Williams. It locks itself and Fordney has the key. You don't want to wall yourself in."

Before Williams could reply, Norris had

opened the front door and had plunged once more into the storm.

With the coming of night, the early evening gloom had given place to a muffled darkness. The wind was still driving the snow before it in a wild, mad dance along the streets. Norris wallowed through the deep drifts and headed for Bellevue Hospital. He must make sure that Fordney was receiving every attention and consideration.

As he struggled forward from street lamp to street lamp, where pools of silver served as beacons in the dark, Norris' thoughts, far from becoming clearer, began to whirl in bewildering spirals in his brain. The events occurring in that house of dread had become inextricably mixed so that he could no longer reason coherently concerning them.

He seemed to hear the name "Granya" and to feel the radiant presence of the girl beside him in the dark. Yet when he paused to listen, he could hear nothing but the wailing wind; see nothing but the falling snow.

When he reached Bellevue a white-jacketed orderly directed him to the Emergency Hospital. Here he was forced to wait until word of his presence could be sent to the ward. In answer to the summons, Doctor Jamieson, the head

physician, a tall, handsome man with piercing black eyes and full white beard, appeared in the bare and barren hall followed by Doctor Morehouse.

The former gave Norris the information that he wanted. "The man is still unconscious, Mr. Norris. He has received a severe shock to his system. At the moment it is quite out of the question for you to see him."

Norris readily concurred. "My purpose in coming over was not so much to see Fordney as to find out whether he will live."

Doctor Jamieson stroked his beard thoughtfully with a firm hand. "That is something that it is impossible to predict. He is old and may succumb from the shock to his system. On the other hand, if his heart proves strong enough to stand the strain, he may pull through. I have seen worse cases come through all right."

"Whatever the outcome," returned Norris earnestly, "don't spare any expense, Doctor. I'll stand sponsor for the man."

Doctor Jamieson smiled in a peculiar way. "The police have given orders that he is to live if human ingenuity can bring such a course to pass," he said simply.

Norris flashed a suspicious glance at Morehouse who was listening gravely to the dialogue.

"You think Fordney guilty, then?" he asked pointedly.

Morehouse evaded the question. "I am acting under instructions from Headquarters," he returned unruffled. "Which way are you heading, Mr. Norris?"

Norris was dissatisfied, but he could not stand and argue the matter in the corridor of the Emergency Hospital. "Over to Broadway and the nearest subway entrance," he replied. "Are you going my way?"

"Yes. If you don't mind, I'll give myself the pleasure of your company. Did you ever see such beastly weather?"

The two men left the hospital and forged their way through the storm-swept, deserted streets to Twenty-third. Then they turned westward toward Broadway. Presently Norris broke the silence that entombed them under a white pall of steadily falling snow.

"Doctor, is there a chance for Fordney?" he inquired. "You were present at the examination. Jamieson was too cautious to be exactly satisfactory."

"Yes, in my opinion a decided chance. The fact that he wasn't killed outright is a good sign. I'll look in on him again tomorrow. If anything develops, I'll let you know."

“Thank you. Is he likely to be arrested if he pulls through?”

“I can’t say. Williams is no fool and he is not given to committing rash acts, whatever he may think privately. He’ll collect his evidence first.”

“That’s some consolation. I should hate to see the old fellow lodged in jail after his years of faithful service,” replied Norris with a troubled smile.

When they finally reached the subway, they boarded a local for Union Square where Norris changed for an uptown express. Now that he was alone and was being carried farther and farther from the scene of the crime, he tried calmly to review the murder of his uncle.

What were the clues that the case presented? The skewer-like dagger with its queer markings on the ring handle might have belonged to his uncle and have been picked up on the spot. Therefore the murder might have been one of impulse. Yet the presence of the paper with its significant quotation pointed quite as clearly to a premeditated crime.

The gravest feature of the problem was the girl. It was quite possible that she was his uncle’s wife, that she had discovered the crime, and had fled in terror. On the other hand,

Fordney had intimated that Jonas Fielding had been living alone. The thought of Fordney brought to mind the man's condition. Did Fordney know the secret of Jonas Fielding's life and was the chance of learning the truth hanging upon the slender thread of Fordney's recovery?

When the young chemist alighted at Cathedral, he was no nearer to an answer to any of his questions; so he deliberately focused his thoughts upon his home a block away. The house would be warm and friendly and peaceful. There would be no ugly spectres to raise their heads at his approach; no malignant presence to stalk before him as in Gramercy Park.

The door was opened by the solemn-faced butler. He accepted Norris' coat and hat with the remark in his colorless voice, "Mrs. Norris wants to see you at once, sir."

"What's wrong, Clive?"

"Nothing at all, sir. Mrs. Norris is in the drawing-room."

Norris looked after the departing butler with raised brows, then he turned and crossed the hall. At the drawing-room door he paused. The sound of voices — a man's rich tones mingling with his mother's clear laughter.

Company! The idea was irksome. He was

in no mood to entertain tonight, particularly in the face of the disagreeable news which he must break to his mother. With a jerk he pushed aside the heavy plush portières and entered the long, artistic room.

The burning logs in the big fireplace supplied the only illumination and cast their flickering light upon his mother's stately, white-crowned head and over the slender figure of a young man who leaned one arm against the walnut mantel as he gazed into the bright flames.

At first Norris could make nothing of the stranger's half-shadowed face, then the man shifted his position impatiently and the chemist caught a glimpse of a resolute chin, irregular features and brilliant black eyes in a lean, bronzed face. Like a flash-back on the silver screen there came to mind a wild night at Verdun, a dug-out in a front line trench and those same eyes shining with excitement at the thought of the danger to be run. With a smile that cleared his face like magic he crossed the room in three strides with outstretched hand.

"Graydon McKelvie, by all that's miraculous! I'm mighty glad to see you again, old chap." Norris turned to his mother whose bright brown eyes were sparkling and whose cheeks were tinged with a faint color. "Look out, Mother.

I see that Mac's been up to his old tricks. Beware of him when he pays compliments. He doesn't mean a word of it. He's a misogynist."

"I don't believe it," answered Mrs. Norris calmly. "Besides, he hasn't been paying me compliments ——"

She was interrupted by a commotion in the hall and the sudden appearance of Clive, his dignity considerably impaired.

"There's an officer here with a message for you, Mr. Norris, sir," remarked the butler.

Norris' quick change of expression was not lost on Graydon McKelvie. "Anything I can do for you, Phil?" he asked, in the deep, melodious tones that Norris thought were his greatest charm.

The chemist motioned his friend into the hall. "Uncle Jonas has been murdered. I'll tell you about it afterward when I've broken the news to Mother." He addressed the policeman. "What is it — oh, it's you, Gordon. What's wrong now?"

"Do you remember going to the drug store near Gramercy Park to call up Headquarters, sir?" inquired the burly policeman.

"Yes."

"You dropped your wallet, sir, if you recall. The druggist found this watch on the floor near

where you had been standing and he thought it might be yours. He gave it to me and told me what you looked like. I recognized the description and took a chance on its being yours."

He took from his pocket an old-fashioned watch in a heavy gold hunting-case. Norris accepted the time-piece in silence. The watch was not his, but he faintly remembered that his uncle had carried one of a similar size and make. He snapped open the back in the hope of finding a means of identifying the article. Then he stood and stared dumbly like a man bereft of his wits.

Engraved in the cover were the initials J. T. F. and coiled around the rim was a tiny curl of auburn hair!

CHAPTER IX

NEW EVIDENCE

McKELVIE studied Norris' face gravely for a moment or two. "What is it, Phil?" he queried again. "Something connected with the murder?"

Norris held out the watch. "I'd swear this was Uncle Jonas' watch — it has his initials inside — but how it came to be in the drug store is more than I can fathom."

Instead of examining the watch, McKelvie turned to the policeman. "Thank you, Gordon," he said, slipping a bill into the other's hand. "If any one makes inquiries just forget that you were here."

"Very good, sir." Gordon departed with a knowing wink and smile.

Norris gazed at his friend in dazed silence. "I didn't know you were acquainted with Gordon," he remarked presently.

McKelvie smiled. "I know most of the boys at Headquarters and they all know me," he answered quietly.

Norris passed a hand across his eyes once or

twice and tried to collect his scattered senses. The sight of that curl of auburn hair had thrown his mind once more into a ferment. Gradually he recalled that Graydon McKelvie had had some connection with the secret service during the war; that those keen black eyes had an uncanny ability to read one's mind, and that the clear brain behind that broad forehead could be trusted to work its way through the most complex and intricate of problems. The young chemist sighed with relief as he realized that fate had brought to his aid the one man who could best help him in his dilemma.

He was about to pour forth the story of the evening's strange events when Mrs. Norris joined them, asking what was amiss. Norris' gray eyes flashed a warning to McKelvie.

"I want to break it to her gradually," murmured the chemist. "After all the man was her brother." He turned to his mother who was watching him rather anxiously. "I think I've kept dinner waiting long enough. If you'll give me a few moments to dress, I'll join you in the dining-room."

Mrs. Norris waited until her son had mounted to his room, then she led McKelvie back to the drawing-room. "Tell me," she said. "What did that policeman want of Phil?"

McKelvie's eyes were on the dancing flames. "He came with a message. Mrs. Norris, Phil has promised to tell us his troubles after dinner. Until then I am bound to say no more." He sighed as he spoke. He would rather have listened to Norris' story than feasted on the most sumptuous banquet known to man.

Fifteen minutes later Mrs. Norris ushered her son and her guest into a stately Jacobean dining-room where Clive presided in dignified state. Norris studiously avoided all mention of the topic uppermost in his mind and McKelvie followed his lead. They revived old memories and relived scenes on the Western battle front until the dessert was served. It was then that for the first time Mrs. Norris interrupted the flow of reminiscences.

"Where do you suppose I discovered Mr. McKelvie, Phil?" she asked. "You haven't shown the least curiosity about the matter and you know perfectly well that we had never met before."

McKelvie frowned and shook his head at her but she only laughed and turned her bright eyes on her son.

"I'm sure I don't know, Mother," the chemist made answer to her query as he absently toyed with his spoon. Never once during the course

of the meal, although he had done his share of talking, had his thoughts really been free from the burden of the mystery into which he had stumbled. But it was not the murder that troubled him. His mind was centered on the unknown girl. He saw her constantly before him. Her smile, as he had seen it in the portrait, bewitched him; her fear-haunted eyes which had pleaded with him from the telephone-booth, stirred him profoundly and made him want to rush forth to her protection like a knight-errant of old. But he was sorely handicapped, for he did not know who she was nor where to find her.

Suddenly he became conscious of the silence that had fallen over the table like an invisible mantle. He roused himself with an effort. "Go ahead, Mother. Of course I'm anxious to know how you corralled Mac and inveigled him into coming here."

"I found him at the Children's Hospital yesterday. He and I were there on the same errand — to select a committee to start the campaign for the Children's Christmas Fund. We grew confidential and when I discovered that he had known you during the war, I insisted on his coming to dinner tonight."

"I certainly didn't expect to be given away

like this," broke in McKelvie. "I thought you were my friend, Mrs. Norris."

"What do you mean?" she asked quickly.

"Don't you know that he poses as the world's greatest cynic, Mother," answered Norris. He glanced swiftly at McKelvie and the latter nodded. "We'll take coffee in the drawing-room, Clive."

In the hall Norris drew his mother into the library. Not caring to intrude, McKelvie entered the drawing-room alone and took up a position beside the hearth.

Although he had been employed in more than one secret mission during the war, McKelvie was in no sense a government agent. By profession he was a civil engineer; but a decided flair for criminal investigation and an independent income had led him to adopt the latter vocation as a hobby. Nothing pleased him quite so much as a chance to pit his brains against a clever criminal whose eventual capture meant not only a battle of wits but a desperate and dangerous game as well.

Not any older than Norris in the matter of years, McKelvie was both maturer and wiser, with a wisdom gleaned from the highways and byways of the world, for he had travelled considerably and he had seen much that was ignoble

and sordid which might account for the cynical attitude which he adopted toward life.

He drummed impatiently upon the mantel as he waited. It was more than a month since he had followed a case and his keen brain was eager for a new problem with which to grapple.

When, presently, Mrs. Norris came in with her son, McKelvie noticed particularly that the news of her brother's death had not grieved her to any great extent. She was as calmly poised as though the murder concerned a stranger whose tragic end might momentarily shock but could not disturb the even tenor of her life.

"Mother is as anxious to hear the details as you could be, Mac," remarked Norris, dropping down on the wide divan beside her. "Uncle Jonas has been little more than a name to her for so long that she had almost forgotten the relationship between them."

McKelvie nodded. "I'm all attention." He moved further into the shadows where he could watch the play of the firelight on Norris' fine features.

Anxious to lay his cards on the table for his friend's benefit, Norris began with Fordney's visit to the office. In quick succession he took his hearers through the startling events he had witnessed — his uncle's request, the descent to

the vault, the swearing of the oath, his attempt to open the wooden box, and the unexpected attack upon himself.

"The light was extinguished, you say?" inquired McKelvie.

"Yes. That was what made me turn around."

"How far was the box from the light?"

"Quite a distance."

"Go on with your story."

Norris took up the interrupted thread of his narrative. He told of summoning Gordon, of the discovery of the blood on the ferule, of going out to telephone headquarters. After a momentary hesitation he spoke of dropping his wallet and of the identity of the man who had returned it to him. He related how on his return Gordon had shown him that Jonas Fielding himself had attacked his nephew; he spoke of the advent of Williams, of the accident to Fordney, and of the discovery that the portrait had been mutilated. He ended by giving Williams' theory that the portrait was that of Jonas Fielding's wife, and then he refuted it emphatically.

"And what about the girl herself?" inquired McKelvie calmly.

Norris glanced sharply at his friend. "What girl? I mentioned no girl."

McKelvie chuckled softly. "You didn't have

to, Phil. Your vehemence has betrayed you. Why should you care whether the portrait was that of your uncle's wife or not unless you had either seen or met the original?"

After a pause Norris admitted frankly, "You are right. I did see her." He explained the circumstances. "I can't connect her with the crime, Mac. That is why I did not mention her."

"It is never good policy to eliminate any one too early in the game," responded McKelvie seriously. "That girl must have had a potent reason for venturing out in today's storm alone."

Norris moved impatiently. "Perhaps. A personal reason unconnected with this crime. She couldn't have had anything to do with it. She is the loveliest creature I ever saw."

Mrs. Norris looked at her son apprehensively. Heretofore his profession had absorbed all his energy and time and he had taken no active interest in women. He had his mother to care for him and he was indifferent to the rest. Was it possible that this girl had managed to pierce his armor of reserve?

Norris intercepted his mother's glance and smiled reassuringly. He did not know that the magic alchemy of love was already at work within his veins. "I'm all right, Mother. If

you had seen her, you would feel exactly as I do about her."

McKelvie interrupted. "We've got to get back to first causes in order to solve this problem. Let's reason the thing out calmly and sanely. Let me ask you a few questions. I want a definite picture in mind."

"Go ahead. If I don't get this mystery straightened out somehow, I'll go mad myself with thinking about it."

McKelvie took out his pocket note-book. "This and my automatic are two things that I always carry with me," he explained with a quick smile. "First of all, let's put down the questions that need to be answered in order to arrive at a solution of the murder. Then we'll see if we can find the correct answers."

He wrote rapidly for several moments, and then prepared to read the result of his cogitations. "Suppose you answer the questions to the best of your ability as I ask them, then we can see where we stand at the end of the catechism," he suggested. "One, was Jonas Fielding as he called himself, sane?"

Norris pondered, his brows a level crease above the serious eyes. "Yes," he answered at length. "I think he was. He was cunning and crafty and miserly, but he was sane. There were

moments when I deemed him mad; but, in the light of after events, particularly his murder, his words and actions were pregnant with meaning. Yes, I am fully convinced that he was sane."

"Very good. Question two, what was his reason for living as he did, secreted in the back part of an empty house and protected by a system of signals of his own devising?"

"I have no idea of the true reason. He was afraid of some enemy, but why, or what he had done to incur that enmity, I do not know."

"Do you recall anything about him that might account either for his fear or his mode of life these last five years?" McKelvie directed the question at Mrs. Norris who was listening with a grave face.

"No — not five years ago. But wait," with a sudden brightening of the lively eyes, "I do remember dimly something — a scandal or a quarrel or some such thing — in which Jonas' name came up. It was in a Parisian paper — but it was — um — ten years ago or more," she ended, doubtful of the value of her evidence.

"Can't you recall the exact circumstances?" asked McKelvie eagerly.

She drew her brows together as though the physical act might induce the desired cerebration. "No, I can't recall. I didn't read the

account of the affair at the time. I only remember that my husband was very angry, saying that Jonas had been up to his old tricks again. When I asked what the trouble was, my husband retorted that it was over and done and the least said the soonest mended. He was always most anxious to keep from me all knowledge of Jonas' escapades and I was quite willing to remain in ignorance. I recall that Mr. Norris burned the paper."

"You are sure it was a Parisian paper?"

"Yes, I'm absolutely certain of that fact. I was reading a very thrilling serial at the time, being decidedly more frivolous than I am now, and so I was quite annoyed that my husband should have deprived me of one of the installments by burning the paper." Mrs. Norris smiled whimsically at the forgotten memory. "When I say he burned the paper, I don't mean of course the whole thing, just the sheet that contained the scandal about Jonas, but my story happened to be on the other side. Funny that I should recall a trivial thing like that when I haven't thought of it in years."

"No, not at all strange. The incident was impressed on your mind because it affected you personally. That impression was there in your brain cells, lying dormant until my remark

touched a reminiscent chord. The mind is certainly a wonderful and mysterious thing." McKelvie returned to his note-book. "Question two will have to remain blank until I can get information from the Paris police. Three, did Jonas Fielding ever set foot outside his house during the five years of occupancy?"

Norris hesitated. "I gathered the impression that he never left the house, probably from something that Uncle Jonas said to me," he replied. "That is as positive as I dare be."

McKelvie smiled at the other's cautious tone. "In that case, Fordney must have been the go-between, which brings us to question four. What is Fordney's status in the affair? Is he implicated in the murder?"

"No, that I would take my oath on. He was faithful to my uncle, but I am sure that he was not mixed up in any of my uncle's ventures."

"Question five. How did the murderer get in and out of the house, then, if we eliminate Fordney as an accomplice?"

Norris looked rueful. "I know how he got out. When I left to summon Gordon, I foolishly omitted to close the doors, thinking only of re-obtaining access to the vault. There is no reason why the criminal could not have walked out the front door as readily as I did. As to

how he got in, that is another matter. I don't know."

"If Fordney did not let him in and he could not pass the door in the wall without detection, he must have used another entrance which has not been mentioned so far. I'll look into that myself when I examine the premises. Six, to whom does the scarf pin belong that was used to pin the paper?"

As no one was prepared to answer that question, McKelvie continued, "I may as well group the rest of my queries. I don't think we shall find answers to them at this moment. Why was the vault light put out and by whom? Why was the mummy case removed from its wooden box? What is the relation of this girl you saw to Jonas Fielding since he owns her portrait? Why is she wearing a ring that matches the head of the scarf pin?"

As McKelvie pocketed his note-book, Norris remarked, "You have forgotten something. Why did my uncle attack me?"

"I hadn't forgotten, but I know the answer and saw no reason for wasting time discussing it," replied McKelvie quietly. "If he was near enough to touch you when you turned around, he was too far away to extinguish the light himself. What is the reasonable deduction under

the circumstances? Your uncle thought that some enemy had entered the vault and in his terror he grabbed you. You mistook him for an antagonist and began to struggle, whereupon he, too, assumed that he had taken hold of the wrong person. You see, you were each of you fighting the other under the impression that you were being attacked."

Norris demurred. "Was my uncle strong enough to knock me out?"

"According to your own version of the affair, he didn't. He caught you on the point of the jaw. The blow was sufficient to send you backwards. Then you tripped and fell, striking your head against the wooden box. It was that blow which was responsible for rendering you unconscious."

"I suppose you are right. At any rate we have the evidence of the ferule to show that it was my uncle whom I struck. The murderer must have been a cool hand to chance his crime with another person present at the time."

"I doubt whether you would have been in a position to witness the murder, Phil," retorted McKelvie dryly. "Perhaps you were luckier than you realize when your uncle knocked you down." With a keen glance at the chemist's sensitive face, he added, "Do you think you

could stand more excitement, Phil? I'd like to examine your uncle's house while the trail is hot. No knowing what Williams may destroy or obliterate without realizing the damage he is doing."

"I don't see why headquarters sets such store by him," grumbled Norris. "In my opinion he's not much of a detective."

McKelvie shook his dark head with an amused smile. "You don't do him justice, Phil, even if he did get on your nerves. The man has only one fault. He builds his case and then runs around until he finds sufficient facts to support it. He's too cautious to arrest without facts, but he throws away trifles that may prove to be the real crux of the whole affair. The correct way is to secure all the clues first and from them build a theory that will include them all, no matter how impossible that theory may seem."

Norris exchanged glances with his mother at the unconscious egotism of McKelvie's reply, but he only said, "Does Williams ever abandon one theory for another or does he always stick to the same one whatever the outcome?"

McKelvie's keen sight had not missed the by-play even though he had apparently been gazing at the fire. There was an answering twinkle in his brilliant black eyes as he replied in all

seriousness, "Oh, yes, he often veers around when he finds the wind blowing from the opposite direction. But we can discuss Williams in the Subway, if you care to come with me."

Norris was divided between two desires. He looked at his mother. "I hate to leave you alone ——" he began.

Mrs. Norris laughed. "Go, if you want to. I don't mind in the least," she replied. "In fact I rather envy you. If I were a man I should insist on following where Mr. McKelvie will lead. I know that he is going to solve this mystery for us in a very short time."

McKelvie met the brown eyes with a whimsical smile and a reproving shake of the head. "Phil called me a flatterer a while ago," he said. "I think the term could be applied more appropriately to you, Mrs. Norris. Please don't overrate my ability because, after all, I am only human and of all God's creatures, human beings are the most fallible, you know."

CHAPTER X

THE VAULT ENTRANCE

“Do you know, Mac,” Norris remarked as they left the house, “the only interest I have in this affair concerns that unknown girl. If you could have seen her as I did! I can’t get it out of my mind that she is connected with the murder in some way and yet I hate to acknowledge the fact.”

McKelvie drew his head into his collar, turtle-wise. “Granya is an unusual name. It ought not to be so difficult to identify her,” he said, his voice issuing in muffled accents. “This is a chilly street you live on.”

The wind was still howling dismally but the snow was falling less thickly as the two men crossed Morningside Heights and made for the Subway. On the ride to Twenty-third, both were unusually quiet. McKelvie was piecing together in his mind the parts of the puzzle in his possession and Norris was visioning again the radiant beauty of the girl. Who was she? If he could find an answer to that query, he would be content.

When they reached Gramercy Park West, they pounded on the grilled entrance and presently Freeman opened to them.

"Good evening, Freeman. May we come in?" inquired McKelvie.

"Sure, Mr. McKelvie. I wouldn't keep a dog out on such a night," responded the man with a slight smile.

"I'm overwhelmed by the compliment," laughed McKelvie, stepping into the musty hall. "The police are such frank creatures."

Norris flashed McKelvie a quizzical glance behind Freeman's back as the latter closed the heavy front door.

"Is Sergeant Williams around or is he through collecting clues?" continued McKelvie, casting a penetrating look about the hall which was lighted by a single gas jet.

"The Sergeant has gone for his dinner," replied Freeman, whose wits were not sufficiently nimble to detect the nuance of sarcasm in McKelvie's last query. "I have orders to let no one into the vault."

McKelvie ignored the very obvious intimation that this dictum was directed against himself. He called Norris' attention to the innumerable tracks on the dusty floor.

"Confound it all," he said, but his tone was

more whimsical than exasperated, "what thoughtless creatures human beings are. Here," he pointed dramatically to the floor, "is a perfectly good page ruined by the trampling of useless feet. If the murderer left by the front door, as you hinted, Phil, he must have marked his imprint somewhere along this hall. But what a hopeless task to distinguish even a line of his boot soles when you and Fordney and Williams and the rest of the police have done your utmost to obliterate his tracks."

Norris answered in kind, "Even you, I grant, would have overlooked such a trifle in the pressure of events."

McKelvie traversed the branching corridor and paused to examine the door in the wall. "I never permit events to disturb my equanimity," he remarked lightly, for he was in a particularly pleasant mood. "Kindly remember, Phil, that my brains are slightly superior to those of the police."

"I'm banking on that fact," returned Norris, smiling, "or I should not have been so glad to see you tonight. But, never mind that door. I want to show you the things that really count."

"One step at a time, Phil. A game of this sort demands infinite patience, if one expects to unravel the tangled skein, if you will pardon

the change of metaphor. I'd like to learn for myself just how impregnable your uncle's stronghold was."

He located the hidden lock and inserted an odd-looking key. After testing the mechanism, he closed the door which locked itself.

"Do you notice how solid this wall is when the door is closed?" McKelvie remarked. "There's not a break to be discovered. No one would suspect that there was a passage back of this wall." He inserted his pass key and flung open the door. As he did so an alarm rang loudly through the old house.

The unexpected sound startled them both. Norris explained, "I forgot that Fordney had told me of this device. You see how well Uncle Jonas was protected."

"Yes, trebly so and yet — some one got him in the end," responded McKelvie dryly.

Freeman came hurrying toward them. "What was that bell, Mr. McKelvie?"

"Just a burglar alarm, Freeman. I touched it off accidentally. I'm ready for the vault, now, Phil."

Norris led the way down the lighted corridor, but when he reached the portrait he paused before it.

"There she is, Mac, what is left of her," he said.

McKelvie let his eyes roam over the ornate frame with its gilded scrolls and carved acanthus leaves, and studied minutely the graceful figure and the mutilated face.

“An old-fashioned frame,” was his comment. “The style of some twenty years ago.”

“She can hardly be that old,” objected Norris.

“That’s not incongruous. Your uncle might have had the frame and utilized it to preserve the portrait.” McKelvie swung the heavy frame around and examined the back. “Looks as though another name had been erased. It begins with what looks like an ‘H.’”

Norris nodded gloomily. He could not reconcile the relations between his uncle and the girl of the picture and he did not want to think too closely about the matter. Hastily, as if movement could shut out unpleasant recollections, he opened the massive steel portal and began to descend the vault steps, for the hundredth time that evening as it seemed to him.

McKelvie called to Freeman. “Light up, will you please?” he said. “I have no fancy for breaking my neck on these dark steps.”

With a shake of the head, the man from the Central Office complied, going ahead with his flash; for Norris had paused midway of the

flight as he recalled that the sixth step had been torn up.

"The Sergeant won't like it, Mr. McKelvie," grumbled Freeman as he applied a match to the gas jet.

"I'll exonerate you, Freeman. Leave the Sergeant to me." McKelvie stopped to examine the interior of the dismantled step, then he scanned the vault with keen, searching eyes.

Norris, wondering what his friend was looking for, also glanced about; but he could make nothing of the stone room which was undisturbed except in one respect. The body of Jonas Fielding had been removed for the post-mortem examination.

"Too bad Williams was in such a hurry to dispose of your uncle," McKelvie remarked as he followed Norris across the stone floor. "I was hoping for a chance to examine the body." He bent over the painted wooden box which Williams had opened and studied the lock with great care, both inside and out. It was a heavy lock such as might have been used on a door and it was let into the two-inch thickness of the box.

"Strange," he muttered presently.

"What?" inquired Norris quickly.

"This lock. It can be opened from the inside

as well as from the outside. I wonder —— There should have been a mummy case in here?"

"So my uncle said."

"Hum. He'd probably be about the same weight," commented McKelvie.

"Who would? Uncle Jonas?" demanded Norris with interest.

McKelvie smiled enigmatically. "I suppose that Williams has all the worthwhile evidence," was all he said.

Norris nodded ruefully. "I suppose so. He has the material clues that were found in the vault. I see he has appropriated the bronze ferule as well." McKelvie was no longer listening. He was busy sounding the walls. Presently, without a word of explanation, he dashed up the steps and disappeared along the passage. He had hardly gone before he was back again at the door of the vault.

"I'm going outside to examine those walls, Phil. When I knock, determine exactly where the sound comes from. Let me have your flash, please, Freeman."

Freeman handed over his pocket electric torch without a murmur, although his expression said quite plainly that he did not approve and would gladly welcome McKelvie's departure before the advent of Williams. McKelvie, however, cared

nothing for Freeman's opinions. He went blithely about his self-imposed task and presently Norris heard him pounding on the north wall.

The chemist answered the signal and after a short interval McKelvie rejoined him in the vault. Norris located the portion of the wall from which the pounding had seemed to come, and McKelvie set to work to examine the masonry. After several moments' scrutiny he inserted his pass key and a stone door swung inwards on silent hinges.

McKelvie smiled, triumph in his eyes. "Behold the result of deduction," he said. "I knew there was an entrance here even before we entered the house."

"Because the criminal got into the vault without passing the door upstairs?" hazarded Norris.

"No. We do not know that he came in this way. Besides there is no key hole on the outside, so that this door can only be opened from the vault. I argued this entrance from the presence of this wooden box," and he laid his hand on the painted receptacle that Jonas Fielding had purchased the day before.

"I don't quite see ——"

"You told me that your uncle never left this house; that no one but Fordney ever entered

this back part. Two such elderly men as your uncle and his servant could not have carried that box down here. Therefore there must have been a means of ingress directly connected with the vault which would obviate the use of stairs."

Norris gazed down at the wooden box thoughtfully. Then he stooped and lifted one end. "Why, it's comparatively light, Mac. No heavier than a trunk. Fordney and my uncle might have managed it between them, even down those stairs under the pressure of necessity. Uncle Jonas wasn't as weak as he looked."

McKelvie laughed indulgently. "Are you trying to find flaws in my reasoning, Phil? Remember that this box was supposed to contain a mummy case and that those cases are not usually light."

"How is it that they didn't discover, then, that the box was empty when they lifted it?" put in Norris quickly.

"Because the box wasn't empty," was the quiet retort.

Norris stared at his friend in amazement. "But —— No, you can't mean ——?" he exclaimed aghast.

"I do, most decidedly. How else could he effect an entrance? Notice the air-holes bored on that end, too," pointing them out.

“But the box was locked.” Norris could not bring himself to believe that the criminal had actually invaded Jonas Fielding’s stronghold in the very box which the latter had purchased as a means to evade his enemy. The diabolical irony of the situation appalled him.

“I pointed out the circumstance before that this box could be unlocked from the inside,” replied McKelvie. “That means, of course, that the criminal had access to this receptacle before it was delivered to this address. From whom did you say your uncle bought the box?”

“Kastamuni.”

McKelvie nodded and pulled up his coat collar. “Let’s see where this entrance leads to, Phil.”

Norris followed McKelvie through the aperture which opened upon a slight incline leading upward to the back yard. The wind, tearing madly through the gully between the high board enclosure of the yard, whipped the soft snow about their faces in whirling gusts and drove a sheet of paper squarely into McKelvie’s chest. Instinctively his hand closed over it and he stuffed it into his pocket. It might prove of value since it had evidently come from Fielding’s yard.

Norris, shivering in the gale, could find no

point to the expedition; but McKelvie considered himself rewarded when he discovered that the fence at the back was down and that Fielding's yard was contiguous with another bare patch of ground which abutted on an empty house. This house, with its grimy windows and snow-covered, worn steps, he circled twice to make sure that he had missed nothing that might reasonably serve as a clue.

"Don't you get the connection, Phil?" McKelvie remarked when they were back in the vault and he had closed the wall against the night and storm.

"No, I can't say that I do." Norris was engaged in brushing the snow from his clothes.

"The box was delivered at the Fourth Avenue house. Probably Kastamuni's men were told to leave it in the back yard. After dark Fordney and your uncle could pull or push the box into this vault. The exertion would demand a decided physical effort, but it was not an impossible feat for them to accomplish, particularly as they used rollers. That high board fence would prevent neighbors from realizing what was toward."

McKelvie had taken the sheet of paper from his pocket and carried it beneath the gas jet as he talked. He had barely glanced at the

smudged writing when a shower of blows disturbed the mouldering stillness of the empty house. Reluctantly Freeman crept up the steps and vanished into the corridor.

“That’s Williams, I presume,” remarked McKelvie without enthusiasm, thrusting the paper back into his pocket. “By the way, do you happen to recall the nature of the inscription on the dagger?”

“No, I don’t ——” began Norris. McKelvie signalled silence. Williams was descending the steps. “I wonder if I can induce him to show me the dagger?” whispered McKelvie.

“Why shouldn’t he?” returned Norris in the same guarded tones.

“Jealous of me. Afraid that I might discover something that he had missed. He dislikes me — intensely.” McKelvie approached the detective. “Good evening, Sergeant,” he said affably.

“Good evening,” growled Williams, not over-pleased but unable, because of the other’s friendship for the Chief, to object openly to McKelvie’s presence. “It beats me how you get wind of these cases so quickly.”

McKelvie chuckled. “Fate, Sergeant. The goddess taking pity upon you. I am destined to save headquarters many a pitfall.”

“Oh, of course. I suppose you have solved the mystery already?” with an ironic tinge in the rumbling tones.

“No, I haven’t even begun to spin theories. So I am one lap behind you in the race, Sergeant. The thing that bothers me most is the inscription on the dagger.”

“What inscription?” demanded Williams with instant suspicion of his rival’s honeyed tones.

“What! Don’t you know that there are Egyptian characters engraved on the ring handle of that silver skewer? Dear me, Sergeant, you mustn’t overlook so valuable a clue.”

Norris was amused at McKelvie’s solicitude, particularly as the marks on the dagger were too indistinct to have been recognized as hieroglyphics. Williams, however, was too matter-of-fact to perceive that he was being gulled. He knew McKelvie’s reputation and he had no desire to pass up anything that to the private investigator seemed a possible clue. From his overcoat pocket he took a flat parcel, unwrapped it, and disclosed the weapon.

McKelvie’s dark eyes grew eager but Williams made no move to hand the dagger over. Instead he studied the handle with frowning care.

“Humph,” he said presently in a dubious

tone, "if that's an inscription my name's not Williams. Those are just marks on the metal, mere scratches. Nothing to make a fuss about." He began to rewrap the dagger.

Noting the disappointment that crept like a shadow over those keen black eyes, Norris decided to come to his friend's aid. "They looked like characters to me," he said bluntly. "My uncle was an Egyptologist, Sergeant."

Williams turned his jaundiced eye on the chemist. "How do you know so much about the weapon, Mr. Norris? It seems mighty queer that you should have been in the vault when the murder was committed. I haven't forgotten that you struck your uncle once at any rate."

Swift as a darting swallow the thought flitted again across Norris' brain, "He's bound to suspect me. The seed of suspicion is beginning to germinate."

It was McKelvie who answered tersely, "Don't get the absurd idea into your head that Mr. Norris is guilty, Williams. He has simply used his eyes to good advantage, as I have mine. Even from here I could tell that those marks were not entirely meaningless."

Williams gave McKelvie a startled look, and again examined the weapon. "Can you read this Egyptian stuff?" he inquired abruptly.

“I’m not a walking compendium of knowledge, Sergeant. Unfortunately hieroglyphics remain a closed book to me. Some day I shall take time off to delve into the subject,” replied McKelvie seriously.

Williams placed the dagger in the eager hand of his rival and Norris read in the massive face a certain selfish satisfaction. It was as if the detective had said in so many words, “I keep the weapon. A single look will appease without enlightening my rival.”

With a pleased sigh McKelvie held the ring handle to the light and carefully turned it round and round. He took out his key ring and produced a tiny magnifying glass which he applied to the dagger, continuing to turn the handle round and round. Norris watched his friend closely, puzzled by this maneuver.

As he saw the eyes begin to sparkle he realized what McKelvie was up to. The latter was memorizing the marks upon the dagger. Even while Norris was marvelling at his friend’s ingenuity, McKelvie handed the weapon back to Williams with a non-committal face.

“Well?” demanded Williams aggressively, enfolding the dagger in its wrapper as carefully as though it were made of glass. “What is the verdict? Am I a dub or not?”

"It never occurred to me to brand you in that manner, Williams," returned McKelvie suavely. "We are all dubs at times," he added lightly with an ingenious smile. "Even yours truly."

The scowl which had grown darker on the detective's heavy brow relaxed. "And the marks on the weapon?"

"May mean much or nothing. My advice would be to take the dagger to the Museum and secure an expert's opinion on the subject."

Williams humphed as much as to imply that he knew his duty, but he wore an unmistakably complacent look. Norris could see that the detective was patting himself neatly on the back at his own astuteness, whereupon the young man winked brazenly at McKelvie who answered the challenge with a sudden, joyous grin.

"Phil," he whispered, "I want a look at the library — alone. Stay here with Williams. Tell him anything. Only keep him from following me."

Before Norris could expostulate McKelvie had gone. Williams started, turned swiftly to follow, but Norris intercepted him. "Sergeant," he said, "I have news that will probably interest you."

"What sort of news?" Williams spoke with one heavy boot on the bottom step.

Norris saw that to hold the detective, he would have to startle the man. "I know how the criminal entered this vault."

Williams laughed scornfully. "That's not news. I have known the answer to that problem from the start. Your uncle's servant let the fellow in."

"On the contrary, my uncle himself brought the criminal into his house," responded Norris laconically.

"What!" Williams forgot McKelvie and came hurtling back to Norris. "Say that again." Norris complied, repeating his assertion.

"You're not — dreaming? I understood that your uncle barricaded himself here for five years. Was he likely to admit his enemy, Mr. Norris?" Williams waxed sarcastic.

"I'm quite sane, Sergeant. The truth of the matter is easily explained."

"But we will postpone the explanation until we form a compact," remarked McKelvie from the head of the steps. "Show me the scarf pin and the paper which was fastened to the body, Williams, and I'll tell you how the criminal forced his enemy to admit him."

Williams debated, anxious to learn what McKelvie could tell him, yet not so eager to show his own hand. Curiosity prevailing, he finally

consented to the agreement, which proved of mutual satisfaction to both parties.

Having learned all that could be gleaned from the scene of the crime, McKelvie suggested that they give Williams a free field.

“Don’t forget the inquest at one tomorrow, Mr. Norris,” Williams called after them.

McKelvie smiled sardonically. “The police always set such store by the inquest. I doubt if he learns one atom of evidence that will do him a bit of good.”

Norris was not interested. He had suddenly discovered that he was tired and that it really didn’t matter who killed his uncle as long as the girl of the portrait was not implicated in the affair.

“What now, Mac?” he asked wearily.

“Bed, I should say. There is really nothing more to do until I can question the dealer about the mummy case. Will you care to come with me, or shall I tackle him alone?”

“I’m coming with you. I’ve got to know the answers to all those questions you propounded. I’m in too deeply to let go now.”

“Meet me at Kastamuni’s at nine tomorrow, then,” answered McKelvie. “Good night, Phil. Better try to get some sleep. You look all in, old chap.”

CHAPTER XI

THE DEALER IN ANTIQUES

NORRIS, fatigued by the strain of the evening's adventures, had no difficulty in getting to sleep that night. But it was only his body that rested. Fantastic dreams pursued him, in which he alternately loved and hated the unknown girl; sometimes discovering that it was she who had wielded the dagger; oftener killing his uncle himself in a fit of jealous rage. And always, no matter what the dream, he stealthily embalmed his uncle and sealed the body secretly in the vault.

At breakfast the next morning, Mrs. Norris, whose interest in the mystery was as keen as that of her son, demanded to know what conclusions had been reached.

"Nothing so far, Mother," responded Norris. "If only we knew what enemies Uncle Jonas had, we might be able to solve the mystery of his death. With Fordney out of the running, we shall have to delve into his past unaided. You don't happen to know of anything that would help us?"

"No, I am afraid not. Jonas never told me any details concerning his affairs. What we learned came from other sources. What about the girl, Phil?"

"Nothing new. I can't believe that she was Uncle Jonas' wife." He added in a different tone, "Mac plans to interview the dealer this morning. I may have some news for you when I return."

As Norris was leaving, he said to his mother, "Telephone Miss Warner that I won't be down to the office today. If anything of importance turns up, she can let you know."

The storm of yesterday had passed, leaving in its wake untrodden wastes of snow, vast spaces of virgin purity that reflected the glittering rays of the winter sun with blinding brightness. But it was not the glinting sunlight that dazzled Norris and confused his vision. His eyes were bound by the sight of a girlish figure in a sable coat and toque that ran lightly down the steps of the last house in the row and slipped into the waiting motor.

Something familiar about this figure sent a thrill of excitement down Norris' spine. He rushed across the intervening space that divided him from the car. By the time he reached the spot the machine had glided silently away.

In puzzled wonderment, Norris stood looking after that streak of crimson that ran like a trail of blood across the white expanse of unbroken snow. Then he laughed at his own ridiculous fancy. Was he going to suspect every wearer of a sable coat? The unknown girl could not possibly live in Morningside Heights. There was no connection between Gramercy Park and the wealthy neighborhood in which he lived.

He paused on his way to the Subway, startled by a sudden thought. There had been a connecting link between the two neighborhoods in his case, why not in the girl's? He must find out who dwelt in that end house.

Aleppo Kastamuni's Antique Shop was situated in lower Fifth Avenue. Norris knew the place. He had been in once or twice with friends although he had never met the proprietor who was said to be a queer character, clever, sly, and considered half-mad by some.

When Norris reached his destination, he found McKelvie pacing up and down before the door of the shop like a watchdog. The latter greeted his friend with a glum expression.

"Williams has been in there badgering the Jew," he commented. "I suppose that when we go in, Kastamuni will be tempted to throw us out rather than give us information. Williams

has about as much tact as a blundering bull in a china store."

"Why didn't you question Williams when he left? Then you wouldn't have to bother the dealer," asked Norris.

McKelvie laughed oddly.

"I told you before that Williams doesn't like me. He would simply try hard to send me off on a false scent. With him everything is fair in love and war, and this is war to the hilt, where he is concerned. If it were only Jones who had charge of the investigation, we might pull in double harness quite amicably. But what's the use of growling over what can't be helped? Let's go in. There is no harm in casting about. My fly might land us a fish or two."

He opened the door and Norris followed him into a dimly-lighted octagonal room where a hushed, religious atmosphere pervaded, resting with a benediction upon the varied and beautiful antiques and relics and other *objets d'art* with which the place was filled. There was one vase in particular that caught Norris' eye, an exquisite little piece of *sang-de-bœuf* shaped like an amphora. As the young chemist took it up to examine it more closely, Aleppo Kasta-muni came out from the darkness of an obscure

recess and held out a long bony hand for the vase.

"That's sold," he said harshly, in slurring tones, as if he feared that the young man might contaminate it.

Norris relinquished the vase as he scanned the odd figure before him. The dealer was bent almost double by the misshapen twist of his back. From between hunched shoulders peered a sharp, olive-tinted face with restless, darting eyes, a large, prominent nose, and an untidy, long gray beard. He was dressed in a loose black robe and wore a skull cap on his unkempt gray hair. Yet there was an impression of conscious power that emanated from him as though he were accustomed to commanding and being obeyed.

As Kastamuni placed the vase inside a cabinet with a caressing motion of his thin hands, McKelvie, who had been glancing casually about the room but who had really been studying the dealer, approached the Jew. Taking a card from his pocket, McKelvie held it out to the hunchback. The Jew took it, glanced at it, and then crumpled it angrily in his claw-like fist. His olive skin grew darker. With a swift, gliding motion he reached the door and flung it open.

"Get out," he cried in a voice choked with

rage. "I had to answer the damned police but I won't have anybody else snooping about my affairs."

McKelvie crossed to the door, swung it shut, and placed his back against it. "Come, Mr. Kastamuni, you are only rendering yourself liable to suspicion. I did not come here to accuse you as Sergeant Williams did."

"How do you know that?" demanded Kastamuni quickly, his black, beady eyes darting restlessly over McKelvie's serious face. "Are you connected with the police?"

"No, but I am acquainted with Williams' methods. As I was saying, I came here to get information to help clear you, not to incriminate you."

McKelvie nodded toward Norris who had been watching this passage at arms with keen interest, wondering which would win out in the end.

"This gentleman is Mr. Norris, nephew of the murdered man. He wants to get to the bottom of the mystery."

"I know nothing about it," sullenly remarked the dealer.

"I'm not saying you do. I simply want to trace that mummy case that was removed from the box. The entire thing came from your shop.

It will be sufficient if you tell me when it was purchased and by whom."

Kastamuni stood silent for a while, contemplating his long, thin hands. Presently he growled, "The police accuse me of sending the box to Gramercy Park West. I never sold anything to anybody in that locality and whoever said I did, lied."

McKelvie shrugged. "I have James Fordney's word for it that he purchased the box from you. Besides I have seen it. It wouldn't surprise me a bit if Williams got out a warrant for your arrest on the charge of removing the mummy case and helping the criminal smuggle himself into the house in Gramercy Park."

A sly, crafty expression stole into the beady eyes. "Let him bring the warrant," exclaimed the Jew angrily. "He can't put me behind the bars on any such charge. I can prove I never sold anything to any one by the name of Fordney. Just ask Coster & Son where they delivered that box. And if you don't believe them, why go and inquire of Agnew & Co., the big importers of antiques."

"There's no point in becoming angry with me," remarked McKelvie, complacently. "I'm not responsible for what the police will do. If you find yourself in difficulties, you might try

sending for me. I may be in a position to aid you, even though you have refused to give me information."

The dealer smiled satirically, a skeptical light in his crafty eyes, as though he had no great faith in McKelvie's promises.

At the door, McKelvie paused. "One more question. Was that box originally supplied with hinges and a lock?"

"Mummy case receptacles that are genuine don't have locks and hinges," retorted the Jew, a trifle contemptuous of the other's abysmal ignorance. "The lid is fastened on by means of wooden pegs that fit into grooves in the box itself."

"My mistake. Good morning."

The two men left the shop and the dealer closed the door upon his unwelcome visitors with obvious relief.

"He wasn't exactly garrulous," commented Norris.

"No. He's clever. Williams, like a blundering fool, put the Jew on his guard. We'll never get anything out of the fellow now, if we live to be as old as Methuselah."

Norris clutched McKelvie's arm in quick excitement. "Do you see that crimson car, Mac?" he exclaimed, his eyes on a low-slung roadster

that had drawn up before Kastamuni's door. "I saw that car in Morningside Heights this morning. I am almost certain that the girl who is driving is ——"

He broke off abruptly as McKelvie drew him into the shadow of a nearby doorway. The girl had descended from the car and was looking about her as though uncertain of her destination. Then she caught a glimpse of Kastamuni's sign, and crossing to the door, she entered the shop. But not before Norris had recognized her. She was the girl he had seen in the drug store, the girl whose mutilated portrait was standing in his uncle's home. Even that brief glimpse of her set his heart to racing in a most unaccountable manner.

"What," he asked in a troubled tone, "do you suppose she wants of Kastamuni?"

"That I cannot say. Although it is always possible that she may be interested in antiques," returned McKelvie dryly. "But, what's up now?"

The girl had emerged from the shop, the Jew at her side. He was talking rapidly and gesticulating wildly but she was evidently not interested in his remarks. Several times she shook her head, each time more emphatically. When she reached her car, she slid into her seat and

had the roadster in motion before the dealer could finish his sentence. Angrily he shook his fist, then scurried back to his store.

“That young lady is quite capable of looking after herself,” was McKelvie’s appraisal. “Come, Phil. Staring after her car isn’t going to help us solve this mystery.”

Norris came back to himself with a start. “What’s the program?” he asked. “Another interview with Kastamuni?”

“Do you think he would be inclined to be confidential over an argument in which he was worsted? I have a better lead than that. I’m going to see what Coster & Son can do for us.”

CHAPTER XII

THE DUPLICATE CASE

“Is Kastamuni mixed up in this affair?” inquired Norris as they swung toward Third Avenue.

McKelvie, who had stopped at a drug store long enough to obtain Coster’s address, came out of his brown study. “Frankly, I don’t know. It all depends where the mummy case was removed from its box.”

“Where the mummy case — yes, of course, I had forgotten that in order to enter the outer receptacle the criminal would have first to dispose of the inner coffin.” He sighed impatiently. “I hate to believe that the girl is concerned in the murder.”

“It all hinges on the question of motive, Phil. Perhaps she had good reason for wishing your uncle dead.”

Norris was silent. His uncle certainly had known the girl. The portrait was conclusive proof of that fact. Moreover, she was acquainted with Kastamuni, the man who had sold his uncle the wooden box by means of

which the criminal had effected an entrance into the house. Could she have been the one to hide —— But, no. He would not think that. Besides, the whole business was an impossible muddle. He was merely wasting time in speculation.

By this time they had turned into Third Avenue and had paused before a flight of steps that led into a dark and dingy basement. On the iron railing that surrounded the steps depended a worn sign with the words partly obliterated.

TONY COSTER and SON
LIGHT EXPRESSING and ARTAGE
CHEAP at the PRICE

This sign, as crazy as the lettering upon it, hung by one edge, clattering noisily against the railing and waking the echoes with its din. To Norris, who was totally unused to scenes of squalor, the thought of entering that basement was repugnant, but since his chance of unravelling the mystery was dependent upon his descent into that subterranean cavern, he put aside his squeamishness, and picked his way down the dirty steps to the narrow, cemented room below, where McKelvie had already preceded him.

The atmosphere was so thick that one could

almost part it with one's hands, rank and fetid with the mingled odors of garlic, cheap tobacco and unwashed human bodies. Behind the counter lounged an ill-favored man in his shirt-sleeves.

"Are you Tony Coster?" inquired McKelvie, trying not to inhale any more of that poisonous air than he could help.

"Naw. I'm his son," responded the man, mouthing a toothpick. "Dyu want cartage done?"

"No. I want some information about a case that you were to deliver night before last at Gramercy Park West," explained McKelvie.

The man's ugly face was jerked forward over the counter like the head of an angry snake. "What dyu mean 'were to deliver'?" he asked belligerently.

"Just what I said," replied McKelvie quietly. "Did you deliver the case?"

Coster lifted a pugnacious jaw. "Say, what yu gotta do withut anyhow? Are yu one of them fly cops?"

"No. I'm Jonas Fielding's representative."

The man blinked on the word and Norris thought he was going to choke on the toothpick, but Coster recovered his breath with the dexterity of long practice.

“ Say, what youse guys tryin’ to do?” he snarled. “ I ain’t never delivered nothing to no Jonas Fielding.”

Patiently McKelvie persisted. “ That’s what I’m trying to get at,” he said. “ Jonas Fielding bought the case from Kastamuni. If you didn’t deliver it to him, to whom did you take it, then?”

Coster’s dull eyes brightened. “ I get youse now,” he averred more affably. “ But youse got the wrong dope. We ain’t delivered nothing to the wrong parties. I gotta receipt for both them cases.”

As the expressman dived under the counter, McKelvie exchanged glances with Norris. “ We’re getting on,” he whispered exultantly. “ Did you notice what he said, Phil?”

Norris nodded gloomily. It seemed to him that the existence of another mummy case receptacle only served to further becloud the issue.

At this moment Coster produced a dirty file case which he slammed on the counter and opened. Then with a frequently moistened flat thumb he turned the pages until he found the papers he was seeking.

McKelvie glanced at them and handed them silently to Norris. They were the usual type of printed cartage bill. One was made out to Eldredge Howe on Morningside Heights; the

other to Oldfield Kramer at an address on Fourth Avenue.

The first was of no interest to Norris. The second held his astonished gaze, for at the bottom, in Fordney's unmistakable, cramped hand, was an acknowledgment of the delivery of the painted wooden box.

As Norris returned the receipts slowly to Coster, McKelvie continued, "Where did you leave the case that you delivered to Mr. Kramer?"

"In the back yard. I told the old fool of a servant that weren't no place to leave that box, but he would havut, so I should worry." Coster slammed the file back into place. "Say, if they's anything wrong wit' those deliveries, take it from muh that the Jew's the one that's to blame, see?"

"Perhaps you're right. Were those cases very heavy?" inquired McKelvie.

Now that he had cleared himself of suspicion Coster seemed not averse to talking nor McKelvie to listening, though Norris was impatient to get away from that close room.

"Purty heavy, Mister," returned Coster in answer to McKelvie's query. "The one we carried indoors was some baby. Musta weighed a ton."

"And the other one?"

"Not so bad but she might have been worse," grinned the man.

Having learned sufficient for his purpose, McKelvie thanked Coster for his amiability, and motioned Norris that he was ready to leave. When they once more reached the level of the sidewalk, the chemist filled his lungs with the cold fresh air.

"Phew! One more minute down there and I'd have expired. Even my chemicals aren't so vile as that atmosphere. How could you stand it, Mac?"

"Not from choice. I have to stand worse than that sometimes or I would never catch even the tail of a clue. But since you object so strongly to Third Avenue, suppose we try Front Street. I should like to have a talk with Mr. Agnew."

At Norris' impatient jerk of the shoulders, McKelvie smiled. He knew that his friend was finding the road of investigation long and tedious, and tame by comparison with the amazing events through which he had been carried the evening before.

"What's the trouble, Phil?" he said.
"There's no royal road to the end of a mystery, you know."

"But, we're getting nowhere," expostulated Norris.

"On the contrary, we have made great progress this morning," asserted McKelvie calmly. "We know that Fordney purchased the case under the name of Kramer, and that it was left in the yard of the vacant Fourth Avenue house back of your uncle's place. We also know that there was another case delivered to Eldredge Howe on Morningside Heights ——"

"What of it?" interrupted Norris impatiently. "Eldredge Howe is a noted Egyptologist. I've seen his name mentioned in the papers in connection with various controversies concerning things Egyptian. What is there so strange in his having bought a mummy case?"

"Not in his having bought one, but in the fact that his case and your uncle's left Kastamuni's store at the same time. How do we know that Howe bought a mummy case and not simply an empty receptacle?" suggested McKelvie calmly, although his eyes were dancing.

Norris surveyed his friend in amazement. "What are you hinting?" he asked, startled.

"At nothing in particular. But it's a nice little problem all its own, just the same. And it may account for your uncle's receiving the empty box so opportunely."

“Mac,” Norris exclaimed suddenly, after revolving the other’s statement in his mind, “I have just reached a horrible conclusion. From the address on that cartage bill, I am quite certain that the girl must know Eldredge Howe. It was his house that she came out of this morning.”

“Ah,” said his companion softly. “We must call on Eldredge Howe and meet this young woman, if it is possible.” He glanced at his wrist-watch and hailed a passing taxi. “At present we have just time to see Agnew before the inquest.”

As he took his place in the motor, Norris passed a hand over his brow. “I’d forgotten all about that formality. What’s the good of an inquest?”

“Oh, it gives the coroner a job and Williams the opportunity to show off.” McKelvie added in a more serious vein, “There is always the chance of learning something of value, although such a possibility is extremely doubtful in this instance. We know how the criminal got in and out. What we need to learn is the motive for the crime.”

“Wouldn’t it be a good plan then to learn the history of my uncle’s past?”

McKelvie smiled tolerantly. “My dear fel-

low, for what do you take me? I cabled Paris last night for information."

"Why depend on Paris alone? My uncle did not always live in Paris."

"Your logic is admirable. I went to Bellevue this morning. Fordney is coming around. In a day or two we ought to be able to secure his story. He should know something of your uncle's past."

The taxi pulled up before a large brick building and the two men alighted.

Agnew & Co. proved to be a humming hive of activity. Without, boxes of goods were being checked off and installed; cases were being inspected and loaded on trucks. Within, dealers of every state and condition from the rich owner of an uptown Fifth Avenue establishment to the mole-like proprietor of a dingy basement in the Ghetto were haggling over prices; clerks were nimbly darting to and fro like buzzing bumblebees; here and there an antiquarian gloated over some newly discovered treasure which he caressed with longing glance while he debated whether his fast dwindling income would stand the added strain.

A vivacious blond behind an enclosed glass cage labelled "Cashier" smilingly directed McKelvie to the third floor where Mr. Agnew had

his offices. Norris experienced the strange sensation as he left the elevator that he was stepping into a new world, so marked was the peace and serenity of Agnew's office by contrast with the confused movement and incessant chatter of the floor he had just quitted.

McKelvie's card and an engaging smile bestowed on the pretty secretary in the outer office obtained the desired result, almost instant admission to Agnew's presence, much to Norris' secret amusement. He had to acknowledge that McKelvie was a past master in the art of getting what he wanted. The latter was a born wheedler, an inheritance from his Irish mother.

Thus Norris was not surprised that Agnew received them so graciously. The head of the importing firm was a florid-faced man, inclined to portliness, with a pleasant manner and a confident, alert eye. As he inquired genially what he could do for McKelvie, he studied the young men and judged them shrewdly.

McKelvie, on his side, was debating how to answer. One of his maxims ran something like this: Never take the whole world into your confidence in an investigation of a mystery, for there is bound to be one among the number who will play you false.

This precept, whose wisdom was a direct gift

from his canny Scotch forebears on the paternal side of the house, influenced McKelvie's talk with Agnew.

"I'm looking for a mummy case to add to my collection. If possible I should like to purchase a duplicate of either of the cases that you recently sold to Kastamuni," he began tentatively, like a man feeling his way through a difficult situation.

Agnew smiled at the *naïveté* of the request. "My dear sir, do you think that mummy cases grow on trees? I could not possibly duplicate those cases for the simple reason that they already happen to be duplicates. Very seldom are two of these coffins carved alike. Those you are speaking of happened to belong to twin princesses. I don't suppose you could find another like them in the world."

McKelvie's mobile features expressed the proper shade of disappointment. Before he could frame an appropriate reply, Agnew continued with a peculiar smile, "Have you come here, Mr. McKelvie, because you are investigating the murder of Jonas Fielding?"

McKelvie groaned comically. "The newspapers," he said, ruefully. "I had quite overlooked the fact that by this time the whole of New York knows of the crime. I don't read

the papers when I am engrossed in a case." He added carelessly, "Was that a chance shot, or a shrewd guess, Mr. Agnew?"

"Say rather the ability to add up a simple sum," responded Agnew pleasantly. "I have heard your name before, Mr. McKelvie. And the newspapers mentioned Mr. Philip Norris, as the nephew of the murdered man."

Seeing that Agnew had been too clever to swallow his bait, McKelvie remarked unabashed, "To be frank with you, Mr. Agnew, I came here to learn all I could concerning those mummy cases. You say that they are duplicates. Do you mean by that that the outer cases are duplicates also?"

"Most assuredly. I doubt if one case can be distinguished from the other."

"Would it be possible for any one to imitate the outer case?"

"That depends. If one of the boxes was used as a model, I suppose that a fair imitation could be produced," returned Agnew, eyeing McKelvie thoughtfully. "Are you suggesting that the case in Mr. Fielding's vault is an imitation of the one he bought?"

"The idea occurred to me," responded McKelvie, his grave face betraying no sign of what was in his mind.

"May I ask why?" continued Agnew probingly.

"I'm sorry that I cannot divulge at present the reason for my conclusion. I will say this, however. The case in question has been supplied with a modern lock and hinges."

"Then in all probability it is the original case. Kastamuni requested expressly that a lock and hinges be put on one of the boxes."

"A lock that could be opened from within as well?" put in McKelvie.

"No. The sort of lock that is usually placed on the drawer of a desk, fitted into the wood with the keyhole on the outside." Agnew reached for the telephone. "I'll tell you what I'll do. I'm interested in this affair since in a way it involves my house. I'll go over with you and identify the case."

"I shall appreciate the courtesy, Mr. Agnew."

Agnew gave orders to have his car sent around and the three men were driven to Gramercy Park West.

Here they found Williams already in command, superintending the arrangements for the coming inquest.

"This is a bit awkward," murmured McKelvie in Norris' ear, when he had introduced Williams to Agnew, explaining that the latter

was the original purchaser of the case. "I don't know how much Williams was able to learn from Kastamuni and I don't want him to know about that second mummy case quite yet — until I have a chance to test the plausibility of a certain deduction. Perhaps I can give Agnew a hint."

That McKelvie succeeded in doing so was apparent to Norris when the four men stood in that cold, unpleasant vault and Agnew examined the case with an inscrutable countenance. When the importer finally turned away Norris could not tell what conclusion the man had reached.

Williams demanded avidly, "It's all right, eh?"

Agnew replied, "Yes, it's the case I purchased without a doubt."

Williams turned triumphantly to McKelvie. "Confess now that you thought there was something wrong with the case," he said.

McKelvie smiled. "You're a sharp one, Williams. How did you know that I suspected its genuineness?"

"Because you suspect everything, looking for hidden meanings where all is clear as crystal," responded Williams complacently.

"What a 'monstrous clever fellow' I deem myself, to be sure. But I won't detain you any

longer, Mr. Agnew. It must be pretty close to luncheon time."

The three men left the house together and when they reached the importer's blue limousine, Agnew said in a confidential tone, "The case is genuine enough, Mr. McKelvie. It's the lock that has been tampered with."

"Ah. Will you be so good as to find out for me whether the lock was changed before the case left your place?" asked McKelvie eagerly.

Agnew stepped into his car. "Call me up sometime this afternoon and I'll have an answer for you," he replied.

"Thank you. And now, Phil, we're only a step from Stuyvesant Square. Come home to luncheon with me. After that you will be ready for the inquest."

"And you?"

"I'll be there. I want Williams to ask Kastamuni a few questions for me."

"What, for instance?"

"The lock might have been changed in his store, you see."

Norris nodded thoughtfully and the two men traversed the remaining distance to Stuyvesant Square in silence. Places always spoke to the young chemist of their past and he was delighted with McKelvie's quaint old red-brick house with

its white porticoed door, a relic of the days when the Square was one of the fashionable districts of town.

They were admitted by Dinah, McKelvie's factotum, a very black, very stout, old southern mammy who handed her employer an undressed white envelope with a gloomy air.

"Where did this come from, Dinah?"

"Ah dunno, Massah Graydon. De bell done ring like it whar possessed and when I open de door dey was nuffin' dere but dis yere lettah," she replied lugubriously. "It am a warnin', Massah Graydon. Doan be gettin' yoself murdered for folks what ain't wuth it, sah."

McKelvie smiled. "Don't be such a pessimist, Dinah. I have managed to survive all my previous adventures." He examined the envelope. "Very cheap grade," he commented. "Delivered by hand since there is no stamp."

He removed the contents, a sheet of ordinary pad paper, and he pursed his lips as he read. "That's queer. This is from Gordon."

"The policeman on the Gramercy Park beat?" inquired Norris.

"Yes. This is what he says. 'The druggist enquired about the watch. He wanted to know if I could get it back for him as he had made a mistake with regard to the owner. Thought you

might like to know this.' What do you make of it, Phil?"

"Well — the watch was my uncle's, of course ——"

McKelvie pocketed the note with an odd smile. "I think," he remarked, "that luncheon is ready."

CHAPTER XIII

J. T. F. CLAIMS THE WATCH

THE inquest, as McKelvie had predicted, carried them no further. Although the strangeness of the crime had attracted quite a large crowd, the evidence was disappointingly inadequate. The scarf pin, the paper with its Biblical quotation, the dagger, were substantial enough clues and satisfactory as far as they went, but no one was able to state whether the articles had belonged to the dead man or his murderer, since the star witness was missing.

Doctor Jamieson, professionally indifferent to the displeasure of the police, had absolutely refused to allow Fordney to testify.

"You move him at the risk of his life," the head physician of Bellevue had protested indignantly. "Besides, he's in no condition to be badgered by the authorities. When he is out of danger you can have his testimony."

In the next place, Kastamuni when he took the stand proved obstinately close-mouthed. Threats and adjurations had no effect on the Jew.

He stood before that room crowded with spectators, reporters, and police, with his head thrust forward between his high shoulders, with his hands clasped meekly in front of him, a melancholy image of the sublime patience of his martyred race, but all the coroner could get out of him was emphatic denial. Over and over he repeated stubbornly in mournfully musical syllables that he had not sold a mummy case to the murdered man, that he had never to his knowledge heard of either Jonas Faraday or his servant Forthright.

Even when McKelvie made a whispered suggestion and the coroner brought up the question of the lock on the case, the Jew merely spread out his hands and shrugged his shoulders.

Norris, looking about the thronged library under the uneasy apprehension that Williams had perchance discovered the girl and remanded her as a witness, encountered the burning eyes of Arlita Farrell's father fixed upon him. He called McKelvie's attention to the gaunt figure.

"What do you suppose he's doing here?" whispered the chemist. "Can he have known my uncle?"

"Stranger things have been known to be true. I have been wondering about him myself since Gordon brought the watch that was found

in the drug-store," returned McKelvie, appraising the pallid face of the actress' father.

"Why should he have it? The watch was my uncle's?" objected Norris.

"I hardly think your uncle lost it," replied McKelvie pointedly.

"You mean ——? But, why should Arlita Farrell's father kill my uncle?" protested Norris.

McKelvie shrugged. "As to that, why shouldn't he have done so? What do we know about him?"

"But what motive ——?"

"That's what we'll have to find out. I don't mean to say that he is the criminal, necessarily. Just that he bears investigating. I think I'll have a talk with him when this inquest is over."

Williams' rumbling tones put an end to the dialogue. "Will you please take the stand, Mr. Norris," he requested, curtly.

Norris complied, wondering what was coming.

"It has been shown, Mr. Norris," remarked the coroner, "that you struck your uncle with the bronze ferule with which you were attempting to open the mummy case receptacle. Why did you do this?"

"In self-defense. The vault was dark. I had no idea that the man who had attacked me was my uncle."

“Why should he attack you?”

Norris gave the explanation that McKelvie had suggested the night before; namely, that in a moment of terror Jonas Fielding had gripped him, and that in the dark, each had mistaken the other for an enemy.

The coroner accepted the explanation without comment and would have proceeded to the next point in the inquiry had not Williams interfered. To the detective defeat was galling and he was particularly incensed at his failure to obtain information of an incriminating nature from the dealer in antiques. Whereupon he abandoned his preconceived theories and jumped to the conclusion that Norris must be guilty since no one else could possibly have entered the house. Williams put no faith in McKelvie's assertion that the criminal had gained entrance concealed in the mummy case box.

“Mr. Norris,” continued the coroner at Williams' instigation, “investigation shows that your uncle had amply protected himself against unwarrantable intrusion. In other words, no one could enter the house without his instant knowledge. Is it not a rather strange coincidence that you should have been present in the vault when the murder was committed?”

Norris ran his sensitive fingers through his

hair with a nervous, jerky movement. "I have told you before that I was unconscious," he replied, uncomfortably aware for the first time of the many pairs of eyes directed challengingly and skeptically toward him.

Williams snorted and the coroner remarked with gentle sarcasm, "You impose on our credulity when you expect us to believe that your uncle purposely rendered you unconscious that he might thereby meet his murderer with no troublesome witnesses about to disclose the author of the crime."

Norris flushed and his jaw set. He might have endeavored to explain more fully had the coroner not seen fit to poke fun at him. Now he stubbornly refused to add another word to his previous statement.

Presently the coroner threw up his chubby hands in despair and disgust. "Since we can neither prove nor disprove your alibi, we shall have to let the matter rest for the present." He dismissed Norris and turned to Williams.

After a hurried conference the coroner announced with apparent distaste, "We have not, owing to the unavoidable absence of certain important witnesses, obtained sufficient evidence to render a verdict. The inquest is postponed for this day week."

With the first outward surge of the crowd, McKelvie pushed his way through the throng to the side of Arlita Farrell's father. Norris, close at his friend's heels, listened in silence to the ensuing colloquy.

"Good afternoon, sir," began McKelvie pleasantly. "Have I the honor of addressing Miss Farrell's father?"

"You have that honor," returned the other with great seriousness. "John Thurston Farrell, at your service, sir."

"Do you recall entering Hammel's Pharmacy last evening to buy cigars?" continued McKelvie, watching the other closely.

The deep-set eyes grew eager. "You have news of my watch?" queried Farrell avidly. He took from his pocket with trembling fingers a copy of the *Evening World*, and pointed to a marked advertisement.

"Lost — On the evening of December — a gold watch in an old-fashioned case, bearing inside initials J. T. F. and an auburn lock of hair. Finder kindly return to No.— Gramercy Park East. Reward."

McKelvie glanced at the notice and came to a quick decision. He presented Norris. "Mr. Norris has your watch, Mr. Farrell. He will

see that you receive it during the course of the afternoon."

"Thank you. The watch was a gift to me. I would not lose it for the world. Will you tell me where you found it? I cannot recall where I mislaid it."

Norris explained how he had come into possession of the watch. When he spoke, Farrell's eyes seemed to devour him with a burning intensity. To avoid their fiery glare, Norris moved aside, only to discover that Williams was observing him with a coldly calculating glance. Uneasily he suggested departure.

Norris was relieved to find himself once more in the open air, free from the baleful stare of Williams' shrewd eyes. The man induced in him a consciousness of guilt, oppressed as he was by the atmosphere of that gloomy house with its ugly, haunting ghosts.

Norris entertained the impression that at any moment the detective would arrest him for the crime. He reluctantly confessed as much to McKelvie as they walked briskly toward the Subway.

McKelvie smiled, a satirical gleam in his eye at the thought of the obvious farce which the inquest had proved itself to be. "Don't take Williams too seriously," he said lightly. "You

have got him so befuddled that he doesn't know where to turn next for evidence."

"He didn't get much from the other witnesses," commented Norris. "Why didn't you testify, Mac?"

"I wasn't asked. Besides Williams knows all I do with the possible exception that the lock of the case had been tampered with. I'm not giving that away yet. I don't want the criminal — if he is on the lookout — to learn too soon how much I have gleaned."

"Why didn't Williams mention the fact that the mummy case was missing and that there is a door in the vault?" asked Norris suddenly.

"He was directing the inquest. When he realized that the inquiry would have to be postponed, he probably decided not to give his hand away. Williams isn't altogether a fool, you know."

"I suppose not. Do you know, Mac, I would have sworn that watch was my uncle's."

"Why, Phil?"

"I don't know. Just an idea that it was," responded Norris, thoughtfully. "I have a vague memory of having seen that case before."

"Intuition isn't proof, Phil, and those old-fashioned cases look much alike. Farrell advertised and described the watch correctly. We

have no reason to assert that it does not belong to him. Have you ever seen the daughter?"

"Once — in Hirshkoff's musical comedy, 'The Cute Little Sinner.' Why do you ask?"

"I was wondering about that lock of hair," replied McKelvie.

"She wore a blond wig."

McKelvie smiled ruefully. "Check," he said. "I shall have to make her acquaintance, I foresee."

"I've heard that she sets the pace for Broadway. I wish you joy in the undertaking," returned Norris laughing. "But what's the program, now?"

CHAPTER XIV

ELDREDGE HOWE, EGYPTOLOGIST

McKELVIE delayed his answer until the two men were comfortably seated in an uptown express. The confusion and noise attendant upon riding to Union Square and making the change at that crowded station with its continual hub-bub and incessant din of clicking toll-gates, were not conducive to conversation.

He took from his wallet a creased sheet of thin note-paper and passed it to his companion. In silent wonder Norris read in a fine, old-fashioned script, smudged and smeared in spots, "You tricked me. If you do not reveal its immediate whereabouts, be assured, sir, that I shall take my revenge.—ELDREDGE HOWE."

"Where did you get this, Mac?" inquired Norris, studying the words intently.

"Last night at your uncle's house. A gift of Providence, Phil. When we went out through the secret door of the vault the wind blew this paper into my arms. I kept it but I attached no importance to it until we learned that Howe also had bought a mummy case which was a

duplicate of your uncle's. Of course the fact might be mere coincidence. Stranger things have been known to happen. Still the girl, if you are correct in saying that she came out of the Egyptologist's house this morning, serves as a link between Howe and your uncle. Therefore we do well to investigate the point."

"Do you consider this a threat against my uncle?"

"The tone of the letter is bombastic. It may not have been meant to be as melodramatic as it sounds. These rabid Egyptologists are always attacking each other verbally. But we dare not overlook a single clue." McKelvie folded away the paper and added with a sigh, "I'm in a quandary, Phil."

"Yes?"

"If Howe has conspired against your uncle, I don't want to show him my hand. On the contrary if he is innocent of evil intentions, I may learn more by frankness. It's the devil's own problem to know which is the right thing to do." McKelvie lapsed into brooding.

They were nearing their station when he finally roused himself to say, "I'd better play safe until I can determine how the land lies. When I left you and Williams in the vault last night, I made a copy from memory of those

marks on the dagger." He again produced from his wallet a sheet of paper which he handed to Norris.

To the latter the marks had the appearance of aimless scratches across the white surface of the page. After a moment's futile study, the chemist glanced inquiringly at his friend.

McKelvie smiled. "Don't look like much, do they? Of course some of them may be slightly off, probably are, for that is an enlargement. They were so very small and indistinct on that ring handle that it was quite impossible to make them out properly without a more powerful lens. But that is beside the question."

He added, as they crossed from the Subway toward Morningside Heights, "My plan is this. I want you to pretend to be interested in Egyptology and to ask Mr. Howe if he will be kind enough to tell you whether that inscription is genuine. After that we'll let things take their natural course."

As they entered the block in which Norris lived, the chemist touched his companion significantly on the arm. Drawn up before the door of the end house in the row was the low-slung roadster.

McKelvie raised his brows. "We seem to be striking home." He applied his finger to the

bell of the white-stone house. Immediately the massive panelled front door swung open. In the aperture a footman in livery stood waiting their pleasure with his spine so curved inwards with excess of dignity that he looked as though he were trying to see how close to his heels he could bring his round, close-cropped head.

Following the plan previously agreed upon, Norris presented his card on which he had inscribed, "In the interests of Egyptology," and requested that it be taken to Mr. Howe. The footman stalked off unbendingly, leaving them stranded in the hall. From somewhere above them was wafted toward them the heavy odor of pine incense and the house was so still that it seemed a sacrilege even to whisper there.

To Norris there was a sense of mystery about the place, a house of hidden secrets and strange occurrences; but McKelvie who seldom let his fancies rule him when on a case, walked about and examined the furnishings, mostly antiques and museum pieces of rare distinction and exquisite workmanship.

After a due interval the footman returned and asked them in a toneless voice to follow him. They ascended a marble staircase that divided midway of its course into two circular branches. Upon the landing thus formed had been sunk

a circular basin filled with clear green water before an image of the goddess Isis whose golden horns were reflected in the still pool. On either side of the goddess were fastened green sconces from which the smoke of incense rose in lazy spirals.

When the two men reached the wide upper hall, they were conducted to the right and ushered into a sort of study furnished in grey wicker. A man of some seventy years with a gentle manner and benign bearded countenance greeted them with a pleasant smile. In his veined wrinkled hand he held Norris' card from which he glanced toward his visitors with an interrogative raising of his bushy white brows.

McKelvie saw at once that they were dealing with a gentleman but a gentleman of the old school of narrow prejudices and strict codes — mild and harmless on most occasions, but capable, like the Romans of old, of the sacrifice of his nearest and dearest if his rigid sense of honor demanded the immolation.

Norris introduced himself and his friend, preferring his request with an engaging smile. The Egyptologist professed himself happy to be of service.

“I am always interested in specimens of hieroglyphics,” he averred. “I’m at the moment

writing a treatise on the subject. I can tell you in a moment what you desire to know."

As he spoke and beamed upon them from beneath bushy brows, Eldredge Howe offered his callers chairs, and resumed his own place at his desk which was piled high with typed sheets and volumes of reference.

Norris handed over the paper which McKelvie had given him. "I trust we have not interrupted you, Mr. Howe. These marks are probably meaningless. I can see that you are busy ——"

But the old gentleman waved the apology aside. Far from being annoyed he studied that paper with its odd markings long and intently; then he got slowly to his feet and began to pace the room, visibly growing more excited.

"No, no, it can't be," he muttered to himself. "There aren't two like this." He came back to the desk. "Would you mind telling me where you obtained this inscription, Mr. Norris?"

Norris glanced at McKelvie for further instruction. The latter answered for him, "Mr. Howe, I am a private investigator. Mr. Norris has asked me to solve the mystery surrounding the recent murder of his uncle. You probably saw the account in the papers this morning."

"I never read crime or scandal," interrupted Howe brusquely.

McKelvie continued as though he had not spoken, "In order to get at the bottom of this affair I must follow every clue no matter where it leads me. That inscription was found on the ring handle of the dagger with which the murder was committed. I came to you because I thought that by deciphering the meaning of those hieroglyphics I might be able to discover the owner of the weapon."

The Egyptologist tapped the paper against his thumb meditatively for several moments. At length he said in a low voice, "You have come to the right person then, Mr. McKelvie. I am the owner of that dagger."

For a space there was silence in the room, an unbroken stillness through which there stole the heavy odor of pine incense. Norris stared at the Egyptologist as though he believed the man had suddenly taken leave of his senses. Even McKelvie was astounded by the declaration, for the thought that the weapon might have belonged to Eldredge Howe had not once crossed his mind.

"Are you absolutely sure that the dagger is yours, Mr. Howe?" McKelvie insisted. "There is no doubt in your mind upon that score?"

The old gentleman shook his head. "I'm afraid there is no room for doubt. This inscrip-

tion," tapping the paper he still held, "is partly obliterated, yet it matches point for point the one on the relic I possessed. It is not possible that two such weapons exist with the markings worn off by time in exactly the same places. But we can make absolutely certain in another way. Did the dagger have at the base of the ring two rough spots as though the projecting pieces had been broken off?" There was in his voice an eager, vibrant note, the true passion of the connoisseur.

McKelvie glanced at the intent face of the Egyptologist. "Yes, I do recall that peculiarity," he said. "The idea came to me when I was examining the weapon that careless handling sometime in the past was responsible for the cross pieces of the handle having been broken off."

Howe smiled. "You came pretty close to it, Mr. McKelvie, but your guess was only partly correct. You see, the relic was not originally a dagger. It was a 'crux ansata,' which means nothing to you if you are unfamiliar with Egyptology." He took a pencil from the desk and drew a figure on the sheet of paper. "There, that is a 'crux ansata,' the symbol of enduring life."

He extended the paper so that his visitors

could see the emblem he had drawn. It resembled a cross with a ring in the place of the upper vertical bar; thus,



“These emblems are found in every tomb,” continued Howe. “Sometimes the Egyptians made them of wood, sometimes of silver, and in some cases of gold, depending on the status of the person to be buried. This one being silver, was found originally in the tomb of a minor prince. It is several thousand years old. I do not know when the horizontal pieces broke off, but I assume that whoever owned the relic after that had happened, saw its possibilities and had the thing turned into a dagger. At least that is its history as far as I know it.”

“How do you account for the dagger’s presence in the murdered man’s breast?” inquired McKelvie, recalling the letter he had found.

“I loaned it to Aleppo Kaşamuni ——”

“The antique dealer?” exclaimed McKelvie, in some surprise.

“Yes.” Howe began to pace the floor again. “He’s quite a learned man, but a rascal, sir, an utter rascal.” The eyes beneath the bushy

brows gleamed with an angry light. "I trusted him absolutely and he was not above tricking me."

"In what way?" demanded McKelvie eagerly.

"He promised me faithfully to let me know who purchased that duplicate mummy case and when I went to the address he gave me the house was vacant — had been vacant for over a year." Howe paused to add less vehemently, "But you gentlemen cannot appreciate what this means to me until you see the case. I've got it down the hall in what I call my museum chamber."

McKelvie and Norris exchanged pleased glances as they followed the excitable old gentleman out of the room. In the wide hall Norris thought he detected a shadow at the far end which whisked out of sight as they approached. He called McKelvie's attention to the fact in a low tone.

McKelvie nodded. "Some one was listening to our conversation with Howe. I caught the rustle of a silk garment a while ago. For that reason I allowed the old gentleman to do the talking. I think he's innocent enough, but what do we know of his household, particularly the girl?"

The museum chamber was in reality an Arabian Nights' palace of wonder and enchant-

ments. Gossamer veils, finely spun as a spider's web, heavily embroidered in gold, decorated the walls, hung between sculptural fragments of the heads of kings and queens and princes of various Egyptian dynasties.

In the cabinets that ranged the walls were specimens of Egyptian art; alabaster jars, cosmetic pots, vases of green and blue fayence, gilded images, wooden falcons. In the very center of the room was a showcase filled with jewelry; rings, necklaces, crowns, amulets, bracelets, all encrusted with precious stones. But the real gem of the collection was the mummy case which stood alone in one corner with the lid partly raised to give a view of the brown, musty, much-wrapped figure within. Beside the case stood the painted receptacle in which it belonged.

The two young men needed no urging to examine the wooden box. In shape and size, in design and coloring it was a facsimile of the one in the vault of the house in Gramercy Park West. The only thing lacking to complete the resemblance was the lock and hinges.

McKelvie interrupted the Egyptologist's glowing eulogies to ask a tentative question. "This case must be several thousand years old. How did you come to buy it from Kastamuni?"

Howe looked his disgust. "My dear sir, that's what I'm trying to explain to you. I was in Kastamuni's store one afternoon and I overheard some chap ordering a mummy case. I decided that I might as well order mine at the same time, as I have always been anxious to own one. Mummy cases are infernally hard to get. The museums have taken all that we know of, except for one or two in private collections. The man who owned those duplicate cases was a French archæologist who died bankrupt. That's how Kastamuni was able to bid for them."

The old gentleman continued with increasing warmth, "The moment I learned that the cases were duplicates, I wanted them both. The pair would make my collection priceless and absolutely unique in this country. I obtained from Kastamuni the name of the other purchaser and I wrote the man a letter making an offer for the case."

"I see. When did you write this letter?" asked McKelvie.

"Before the cases were delivered. I received no reply. At once I assumed that Kramer — that was the purchaser's name — had thought my offer niggardly. I determined to call on him. Yesterday morning I went to the address

on Fourth Avenue and found the place deserted. Furious at the trick that Kastamuni had played on me, I called at his store only to find him absent. So I returned home and wrote him a letter."

McKelvie extracted a paper from his wallet and handed it to the Egyptologist. "Is this part of it?" he inquired.

Howe gazed at McKelvie in astonishment. "How did you you get hold of it?" he demanded curiously.

McKelvie told him. "You must have dropped it when you returned to visit the Fourth Avenue house."

The Egyptologist's eyes opened wider. "Are you omniscient, Mr. McKelvie?" he asked astounded.

"Just a shrewd guess, Mr. Howe," responded McKelvie smiling. "I simply put myself in your place, that is all."

The old gentleman nodded. "You are right. After I had written that letter, I felt better and, thinking the matter over calmly, I recalled that the expressman had spoken of delivering the other case at Fourth Avenue. I determined to have another try at the house. By the time I reached Fourth Avenue the storm was rapidly growing worse. I had the letter with me, I had

placed it in my pocket just as it was, for I intended to leave it at Kastamuni's store if I found that Kramer was a myth. In taking my glasses out of my breast pocket, I pulled the letter out also. Before I could rescue it, the wind had whirled it away beyond my reach. This was the second sheet that you found."

McKelvie remarked grimly in an aside to Norris, "Another clue gone." To the older man, he said, "You told me that you wrote to Kramer before the mummy case was delivered?"

"Yes."

"When did you loan Kastamuni the dagger?"

"Day before yesterday. I sent it over to him. He wanted it to compare with another 'crux ansata' he had bought in order to determine the antiquity of his purchase," returned Howe with mounting ire. "If I had known him as I do now, I should not have permitted him to borrow anything of mine."

"Who took the dagger to him?" continued McKelvie.

"My granddaughter ——"

"What has your granddaughter done that she shouldn't have?" inquired a bright voice.

At the sound of that lilting, joyous voice, Norris turned expectantly toward the doorway. The next instant there danced into the room a

bit of autumn glow, a slender young girl with burnished red-gold hair and deep blue eyes whose winsome beauty preceded her like a radiant flame, extinguishing the splendor of that gorgeous room and utterly consuming the young chemist. In that moment for him love's alchemy had done its work.

CHAPTER XV

WHO IS GRANYA HOWE?

THE girl, quite well aware of the sensation she had created, smiled mischievously. "Mayn't I know these gentlemen, granddaddy?" she asked demurely.

"I suppose so," growled the old gentleman with a fond look. "You would find a means of knowing them in any event. My dear, may I present Mr. Norris and Mr. McKelvie. Gentlemen, my granddaughter, Granya Howe."

With dancing eyes and a pretty gesture she held out both hands at the same time; the left to McKelvie, the right to Norris.

McKelvie, who was not the least carried away by the girl's beauty, shook hands formally and released the slim white fingers. Norris, whose mind was still trying to reconcile diametrically opposing facts, accepted the little hand mechanically and mumbled the conventional reply.

So it was as simple as that, he thought. She was Granya Howe, the granddaughter of the famous Egyptologist. And yet — how had his uncle come into possession of her portrait?

Had it been a gift from Mr. Howe? Norris recalled his uncle's strange words to the picture and the inscription on the back. "Granya" was not a common name. So she must have been his uncle's wife. No, that was unthinkable.

But the girl was speaking in her clear young voice. "Is it necessary to hold my hand so long, Mr. Norris?" she said saucily.

When he colored and stammered a confused apology, she laughed merrily, entirely self-possessed. "I shouldn't have minded — only you were hurting me." She flashed him an arch glance as she twisted the ring on her finger.

The sight of that circlet of gold with its incriminating symbology — he could see quite plainly the words "*Bona Fides*" engraved around the base of the three tiny hands — drove from his mind all thought of gallantry. Even the words he had been about to speak died upon his tongue and left him standing mute, gazing into her lovely eyes, reproachfully.

At this point McKelvie, who had been pretending to study Egyptian jewelry but who had in reality been watching Granya, saw fit to interrupt. "Did you say that your granddaughter took that dagger we were discussing to Kasta-muni?" he inquired of the Egyptologist.

"Yes. Yesterday morning I sent her with

it. You delivered the relic to the dealer himself, didn't you, Granya?" asked the old gentleman confidently.

For a moment the girl seemed to have difficulty in answering. She looked beyond the three men with the expression of one seeking inspiration from the ether and Norris saw the color flutter in her cheeks.

Her skin paled perceptibly, then flamed scarlet as with a gesture of defiance she turned back toward her grandfather. "Yes, I did deliver it to him. He was very glad to get it," she made answer quickly. Then, with a smile for Norris, she fled whence she had come and for him all the room was darkened instantly.

"Was your granddaughter away from home last evening, Mr. Howe?" asked McKelvie. "Say about six to half past?"

The Egyptologist looked sharply at the lean, grave face of his questioner, and his eyes narrowed. "Not that I know of. I was told at dinner that she had gone to bed earlier in the day with a bad headache. If I thought the young minx ——"

McKelvie smiled disarmingly. He had learned sufficient for his purpose. "Not at all. I must have been mistaken."

Eldredge Howe brushed aside the excuse. He

walked out into the hall and called brusquely, "Marietta, Marietta, a moment, please."

He was in some ways a martinet, accustomed to being obeyed. There was an instantaneous rustling of silk and from one of the side corridors appeared a little, frail old lady in a black taffeta dress with a filmy, cream-colored lace shawl over her shrunken shoulders.

Her faded glance rested timidly on her brother's face, then flew like a startled bird to light for a fluttering instant on the two young men as they were presented to her. It was as though she mistrusted all new acquaintances.

"Marietta, Mr. McKelvie has just implied that he saw Granya last evening," explained Howe severely. "You told me that she had gone to bed with one of her bad headaches ——"

"So she did, Eldredge, so she did," broke in the old lady in flute-like tones of distress. "Indeed you must have been mistaken, sir." Her frightened, pleading eyes were raised to McKelvie and he saw that she was trembling so that she could hardly stand.

A sudden overwhelming pity for her made him come to her rescue even though he knew she was not telling the truth. "I have already told Mr. Howe that I was mistaken," he reiterated with conviction.

The old gentleman looked shrewdly from one to the other. He spoke to his sister. "Are you telling me the truth, Marietta?"

Marietta Howe clasped her trembling old hands tighter. "Yes, Eldredge," she managed through dry lips.

The Egyptologist relaxed from his severity. He laid a kindly hand on the lace-covered shoulder. "If you say she was ill, I know she was. Don't distress yourself further about it. Come to think of it, she would not venture out in that storm. She's much too sensible."

With a gasping, almost inaudible, sigh, inaudible, that is, to all ears save McKelvie's who was remarkably clairaudient, the little old lady hurried away down the side passage. The swirl of her draperies brought Norris back from the land of dreams. He asked himself if she was the one who had been eavesdropping in the hall. Even as the question took shape in his mind he negatived the suggestion. Miss Howe was a lady and ladies did not stoop to such underhand methods.

But McKelvie was signifying his intention of leaving, was thanking the Egyptologist for his courtesy, so Norris hastened to add his acknowledgments. The two young men had reached the gilded image of the goddess Isis when Mc-

Kelvie turned again to the old gentleman who was watching their descent from the head of the flight.

“By the way, Mr. Howe, Jonas Faraday was living under an assumed name while in seclusion. Did you happen to know him as Jonas Fielding?”

The simple query had a startling effect. If McKelvie had thrown a bomb, the result could not have been more disastrous. From a benign and courteous host, the Egyptologist was transformed into an outraged and infuriated gentleman. His eyes flashed fire, his cheeks grew purple, and he shook a trembling fist toward them, crying out angrily in a choked voice, “If I had known it was Jonas Fielding’s murder you were investigating, I’d have told you nothing. He’s the vilest scoundrel that ever walked the earth. Go — go before I further forget myself.”

When they were once more out in the bright sunlight and the wooden-faced footman had closed the door behind them, McKelvie looked interrogatively at his friend. “Now I wonder what Fielding was to him or he to Fielding that the bare mention of the name should rouse such passion in the old gentleman’s breast,” he said, paraphrasing his favorite Shakesperean drama.

“As long as we are close to your house, we might as well stop there, Phil. I want to phone Agnew.”

Norris acquiesced readily. He wanted to relieve his mind by talking the situation over with his mother. As they entered the hall, Norris remarked, “What made you think that Mr. Howe knew my uncle under the name of Fielding?”

McKelvie chuckled, highly pleased. “A chance shot—that reached its mark. Your uncle’s name had not been mentioned during our interview with Howe. Considering that your uncle was also an Egyptologist and that he owned a portrait of Miss Granya Howe, I decided to try what a judicious use of both names, Faraday and Fielding, could do for us.”

Hearing their voices, Mrs. Norris joined them. While McKelvie phoned, Norris told his mother of the day’s occurrences, dwelling particularly on the phase of it that dealt with Granya Howe.

“Do you think, since he hates my uncle so, that Mr. Howe will try to poison Granya’s mind against me?” he asked anxiously, pacing up and down before the library hearth, for life held for him no more exquisite delight than the pleasure of seeing her again.

“If Miss Howe has anything of the modern

young woman in her composition, I'll wager that she thinks for herself without consulting her grandfather," responded McKelvie, who had entered in time to catch the question. "I fervently hope so, for I want you to cultivate her acquaintance."

Mrs. Norris glanced quickly at McKelvie's serious face. "Graydon, is this girl the answer to your problem?"

Before McKelvie could reply Norris broke in indignantly, "Mac, you are not hinting that you think she never took the dagger to the dealer?"

"What else? You know as well as I do that Granya Howe was not telling the truth when she said she had delivered the weapon."

"Nonsense. I don't believe that. You have no proof."

"Perhaps not. However, to be on the safe side, I phoned Kastamuni, taking the liberty of using Howe's name. The Jew never received the dagger," was McKelvie's imperturbable reply.

"He was lying. Granya is innocent, I tell you," retorted Norris vehemently. But even as he reassured himself an imp of perversity in the back of his mind, reiterated with hammering insistence, "What was she doing near the scene of the crime? Why did she pretend that she

had been home ill when she was out in the storm? Perhaps she alone had a hand in your uncle's death. Perhaps she had good reason for wishing him dead."

"No, no," he cried inwardly in defense of her, "I won't believe it. She never knew my uncle." But the imp whispered with satanic triumph, "What about the ring she is wearing? What about her portrait, eh?"

To drown the maddening thoughts, Norris spoke aloud. "You don't think she killed him, do you?" he asked, dropping into a chair and burying his face in his hands.

Mrs. Norris gazed at her son with troubled eyes, desirous only of comforting him. McKelvie, on the other hand, studied the fine, sensitive face of the chemist with judicious coolness. Sensing that an open discussion of the question would counteract the corroding influence of doubt, he replied kindly, "No, Phil. I know she didn't kill him. One does not have to be a physiognomist to know that, whatever she may have done, she has not murder on her soul."

" 'Whatever she may have done,' " repeated Norris with the impatience of despair. "That is tantamount to saying that she is a confederate, that she is hand and glove with the person who did kill my uncle."

McKelvie shrugged. "She is undoubtedly connected with the affair in some way. She certainly supplied the criminal with the weapon. And then there's the ring. Look at the thing sensibly, Phil."

Norris raised a haggard face. "Sensibly! When every fibre of my being cries out against the accusation?" he exclaimed. "I love her, Mac."

The words slipped out unbidden, startling his mother. But in Norris' heart there was peace. He understood now that he had always loved her, even from the moment when he had first seen her.

For a space there was silence in the comfortable room, broken only by the crackling of the burning logs within the grate.

"But, Graydon, why does Granya Howe have to be guilty?" inquired Mrs. Norris presently. "Why couldn't she have lost the dagger and the criminal have found it?"

Norris flashed his mother a grateful glance but McKelvie only answered calmly, "That would be too far-fetched a coincidence. Besides, her great-aunt lied this afternoon. She is shielding her niece. It was Miss Marietta Howe who was eavesdropping in the hall. The innocent do not require shielding."

"Perhaps not. But sometimes the unfortunate do," responded Mrs. Norris quietly.

At this point Norris, who had grasped at his mother's suggestion and was clinging to it as to a life-belt, exclaimed, "Of course, she lost the dagger. That's the only plausible explanation of the circumstance. As for saying that Miss Marietta was eavesdropping! That's a monstrous accusation for you to make, Mac. She is a lady. You talk like this because you have no faith in women. It's all utter nonsense and I won't be a party to it."

McKelvie smiled at the blue flames enigmatically, refusing to be drawn further into a discussion of his attitude. When Norris continued, "You have no proof. Granya's word concerning the disposition of the dagger is, after all, as good as Kastamuni's," McKelvie merely looked satirical and remarked, "That is an unimportant detail. The thing that really matters is, who is Granya Howe?"

"Who is Granya Howe?" echoed Norris, thinking his friend had suddenly lost his reason. "Eldredge Howe's granddaughter, of course."

"That's what he claims," retorted McKelvie unruffled. "But the relationship does not bear the searchlight of truth. You see," he ended dryly, "Mr. Howe is, unfortunately, a bachelor."

“What!” ejaculated Norris, dumbfoundedly; then added quickly on a sudden inspiration, “She’s probably his adopted granddaughter.”

McKelvie answered impatiently, “Naturally, but that does not alter the original query. Who is Granya Howe?”

Mrs. Norris was the first to catch the implied suggestion. “Do you think she might be some relation to Jonas?” she asked.

“That’s just it. She may be. And that is the important thing for us to learn. That is why I want you to see her, Phil. She will no doubt confide in you.”

“Do you think that I would betray her confidence if she did give it to me?” demanded Norris indignantly.

McKelvie laughed cynically. “I had forgotten that you were in love with her. I see that I shall have to learn her identity unaided.”

Norris flushed angrily and Mrs. Norris interposed hastily, “What did you learn from Mr. Agnew, Graydon?”

“He was engaged at the moment. I left word for him to call me here. By the way, Mrs. Norris, did Phil tell you that the watch that Gordon brought last night was claimed by Mr. Farrell, Arlita Farrell’s father?”

“Yes. I put it away in the desk for safe-

keeping. Do you have to return it?" she asked, opening the desk and removing the watch.

"Since it is his, I suppose we must. It is of no value to us except as it might be connected with the crime." McKelvie accepted the time-piece and snapped open the case. He examined the interior with his lens, took down the number and make, and finally removed a strand or two from the coil of hair. "It's useless to ask whether you recognize this watch?"

Mrs. Norris smiled. "If I had, I should have told you before. No, I don't recognize it. You are not satisfied with Mr. Farrell's identification?"

McKelvie pocketed the watch, and laid the strand of hair in his wallet. "Just a precaution, Mrs. Norris. All investigators are naturally suspicious of every one and everything."

"Some one on the phone for you, sir," remarked the impersonal voice of Clive from the doorway.

"That must be Agnew. If you will pardon me for just a moment." McKelvie hurried out into the hall, and entered the private phone booth near the stairs. In a few moments he was back again, his eyes sparkling animatedly.

"Well?" asked Norris. "What did he have to say about the lock and hinges?"

“ The lock was put on at Kastamuni’s request. Agnew says that when the box left his place the lock had not been tampered with.”

“ I always knew the Jew was guilty,” Norris said triumphantly.

“ That depends on whether he had a motive for the crime. I think we’ll have another talk with him about the case.”

Norris groaned. “ I suppose he’ll tell you the truth? It’s all too impossible and too infernally slow to suit me. Isn’t there a quicker way of getting at an answer to the puzzle?”

“ The cable from Paris. It should have reached my house by this time,” replied McKelvie. “ It’s from the past that we shall learn the motive for the crime.”

CHAPTER XVI

THE CABLE FROM PARIS

IN the Subway McKelvie took Norris further into his confidence. "I'm inclined to believe that so far we have only been scratching the surface in this affair. We have not yet discovered an adequate motive for the murder. To say that your uncle had enemies means nothing. Most men have enemies but the statement does not necessarily involve the commission of crime."

"But in this case it might," Norris reminded him. "Uncle Jonas declared that his enemies wanted to kill him."

"He had been hiding for so long that he had become a monomaniac upon the subject. Since the crime was one of vengeance, he had good reason for his fear. Still the term 'enemy' hardly describes the criminal to my way of thinking. He or she — for of course it might have been a woman who conceived and carried out the deed — is some one whom your uncle had deeply wronged at some time before he went into seclusion."

“But whom? If I know anything of Uncle Jonas, he probably wronged more than one person in the course of his career. Eldredge Howe was one of these unfortunates, yet I should hardly suspect him of having murdered my uncle.”

“The old gentleman is astute. And he was near the scene of the crime at the time of its commission, so that he might be a confederate. He could not have been the criminal since he was on the wrong side of the wall,” reflected McKelvie. “He might have tampered with the lock of that wooden box.”

“I’d be more inclined to distrust the Jew than Eldredge Howe,” responded Norris.

“So would I. Before we go to Stuyvesant Square we’ll have another talk with Kastamuni. He’s going to tell us this time all he knows, including the reason for Granya’s call this morning.”

Before confronting the antique dealer, however, McKelvie stopped to despatch the watch by messenger to Farrell.

“Why don’t you deliver it in person?” asked Norris curiously, wondering whether there was some definite motive for the act.

“I have too much to engross my attention at present. When I definitely connect him with

your uncle will be time enough to question him."

In the dim, octagonal shop figures moved ghost-like through the gloom, silent worshippers in that temple of beauty. Kastamuni greeted the young men with a coldly hostile glance. Reluctantly at McKelvie's suggestion he led them to a secluded recess.

"Why do you persist in annoying me?" he asked plaintively. "I have told all I know — which is nothing. I have no more to say."

"Mr. Kastamuni," said McKelvie severely, "I have learned a number of strange facts concerning you since I was here this morning. In the first place, you claimed at the inquest that you had not sold the mummy case to the murdered man. You know very well that was a quibble. Since Jonas Fielding's servant posed as Mr. Kramer, your pretended innocence is of no avail."

Into the beady eyes of the Jew crept a look of fear. "But I did not know that," he cried out in alarm. "I did not know that. How can I be responsible for what I did not know?"

McKelvie looked skeptical. "So you say. How do I know you are speaking the truth?"

The Jew beat his breast with his fists. "It is the truth. By all the prophets, I swear it. That policeman will arrest me if he hears of this."

Cunning replaced the look of panic. "If I tell you what you wish to know, will you tell the police that I am innocent?"

"If you can convince me of the truth of that statement, I'll go surety for you if you get into trouble," agreed McKelvie. "But you'll have to convince me first."

The Jew lifted his hands. "How can I convince you, if you do not wish to believe?" he asked.

"I'm not quite so pig-headed as that," responded McKelvie lightly.

"What do you want to know?"

"You ordered lock and hinges put on one of the wooden mummy case receptacles. Why?"

"Because Mr. Kramer expressly asked me to."

"When the cases were delivered to you, did you examine them?"

"Yes." Kastamuni added quite candidly, "I examined the cases when Agnew & Co. received them and, finding they were what I wanted, I had them sent to me here. I examined them again here, to see that I got what I bought. They were just as I had seen them before."

"Was the lock of the type that was easily removable?"

"Yes. It was set into the wood the way

a lock on a desk is set in. It could be lifted out very easily."

"Did any one besides yourself see these cases?"

"Quite a few persons. I had them in my shop for a day or two before they were delivered," responded the Jew.

"With what object?"

"Mr. Howe didn't want his delivered until he returned from a trip and there was no sense in having the expressman twice. The more there is to send out, the cheaper Coster makes the rate."

"One more question. I called you on the phone about an hour or so ago and told you that Mr. Howe desired you to return the Egyptian dagger he had loaned you the day before ——"

The dealer broke in angrily. "I said then and I repeat. Mr. Howe never sent me the dagger and he needn't try to throw blame on me when he knows himself he never sent it."

"What do you mean?" demanded McKelvie.

"His granddaughter was in here this morning. When I asked her what she wanted she said, 'I have come to tell you that my grandfather is very angry with you and refuses to lend you the dagger.'"

"What then?" put in Norris hastily.

The Jew smiled craftily. "I wasn't to be caught napping, young sir. That policeman — Williams — had showed me the dagger early that morning. I was afraid to say anything for fear he'd arrest me. I pretended I had never seen it before. So I was quite ready for her. When I told her what I knew, she begged me to say nothing to Mr. Howe about it. Then she ran out and drove away. Not a thing more did she say though I tried to get her to explain."

Norris recalled the scene he had witnessed when Granya had left the Jew gesticulating on the sidewalk. The memory brought a smile and a revival of hope. He refused to admit that Granya could be other than a helpless victim caught in the web woven around his uncle.

"Thank you, Mr. Kastamuni. You have been of material assistance to me," said McKelvie as they were leaving.

The dealer plucked him by the sleeve. "About that other matter. You won't forget?" he insisted.

"No, I won't forget. Williams shall learn nothing from me about you," answered McKelvie laughingly. "Don't worry, no one's going to harm you."

"How does the prospect strike you now,

Phil?" McKelvie broke the silence which had lasted between them for several blocks.

"A trifle brighter. Granya lost the dagger. She was afraid to confess as much to her grandfather and took measures to conceal the fact," Norris explained.

"Humph. That girl is not afraid of her grandfather, Phil. The matter goes deeper than a mere lost dagger."

They approached Stuyvesant Square from Sixteenth Street. In the enclosed park the gaunt trees limned themselves against the distant sky, framed in on either side by the snow-capped roofs of the stark and ugly houses that straggled unevenly toward the river. McKelvie's home with its red-brick façade was the only spot of color in the snow-heaped Square.

They mounted the steps and McKelvie admitted Norris with his latchkey. A bright fire was burning in the study, casting a pleasant warmth over the room and touching gently the shabby old furnishings; revealing only its beauty in grain and wood, kindly concealing shadows effacing its age-old decrepitude. On the central table, propped against the unlighted lamp, was the cable from Paris.

McKelvie opened the envelope eagerly. Dragging a ponderous tome from a shelf filled with

scientific and criminological volumes, he dropped into his Morris chair near the hearth to decipher the message. Norris wandered about restlessly wondering what new revelation was in store for him.

He had had time to imagine every conceivable solution to the question of Granya's identity when McKelvie finally looked up from his seemingly endless labor. His eyes were glowing like the coals in the grate.

"The Parisian police are jewels of efficiency. Listen to this, Phil."

From the pleased inflection of the rich voice Norris divined that the information had proved worth while. He sank wearily into a chair while McKelvie read aloud the result of his efforts.

"Police report on Jonas Timothy Fielding (name Faraday not known). Last seen in Paris six years ago. At that time about fifty-five years of age, of middle height, slender, clean shaven, with greying hair and deep-set blue eyes. Jonas Timothy Fielding involved in a scandal ten years ago. Eloped with wife of Andrew Howe, adopted son of noted Egyptologist. Police believe Fielding responsible for death of Andrew Howe. Nothing definite proved. Fielding married widow. Four years

later Fielding left Paris with wife. Wife returned three years later under name of Arlita Farrell. Won fame as dancer for two years. Taken then to America by Hirshkoff to play title rôle in musical comedy, 'The Cute Little Sinner.' Fielding not seen or heard of in that time."

"Is that all?" inquired Norris when McKelvie paused.

"In my humble opinion that is quite a good deal," responded McKelvie, folding the cable and placing it in his wallet.

"Nothing relative to Granya?"

McKelvie sighed comically, "Nothing. The French police are so very efficient that they never tell you too much or too little. I asked only for information concerning your uncle's affairs."

"He seems to have been a pretty blackguard. I can't say that I am exactly sorry he is dead." Norris brooded with his eyes on the flames. "I don't wonder that Eldredge Howe is bitter against him," he added presently.

"We have been supplied for the first time with a definite motive for the crime. I told you that revenge would be the factor. Eldredge Howe himself may have engineered the whole scheme."

“Are you going to let Williams see that cable?”

“No. Williams can get information for himself. Besides he would only spoil my game by arresting Howe. The old gentleman may be guiltless. He certainly gave that impression. Still he is shrewd and may have been building a clever superstructure of apparent innocence.”

“And Granya?”

“Frankly, she puzzles me. She can’t be Arlita Farrell’s daughter.”

“No,” agreed Norris. “Arlita Farrell is not more than twenty-seven or eight and Granya must be twenty.”

“I was not thinking of the question of age. If Granya had been Arlita Farrell’s daughter, I doubt very much whether Eldredge Howe would have adopted her. He is the sort of man who would hate cordially any one connected with the disgrace to his name, whether guilty or innocent.”

“You don’t suppose that Eldredge Howe — assuming that he is guilty — would use Granya?” began Norris.

“He might, especially if he pointed out that she was helping to avenge her father — provided that Andrew Howe is her father.”

Norris sighed impatiently. “The whole case

is nothing but 'ifs.' Is there no way of arriving at some definite conclusion?"

"None, I'm afraid, until we have a chance to talk to Fordney," returned McKelvie thoughtfully.

"What about Arlita Farrell?"

"I was just wondering. Could you stand another dose of 'The Cute Little Sinner'?"

"I can stand anything to end this suspense."

"Meet me at the theater then, at eight o'clock."

CHAPTER XVII

HIRSHKOFF'S FIND

EIGHT o'clock found Norris impatiently pacing the lobby of the theater where McKelvie had promised to meet him. He wished now that he had not been so complaisant. He had no desire to meet Arlita Farrell. The fact that she had been his uncle's wife only made matters worse. What the devil, he asked himself moodily, was the reason for his uncle's possession of that portrait of Granya Howe?

"I'm only ten minutes late," remarked a familiar voice in mock pleading. "Please don't flay me alive. You look like a thunder-cloud, Phil. What's troubling you?"

"Nothing. I was only wishing ——"

"That you might be somewhere else. Perhaps I can gratify your desire," broke in McKelvie seriously. "I was late because I was delayed in obtaining some information relative to Granya Howe. It's imperative that we learn her true identity. She is attending a dance with a crowd of young people at the home of the Van Dusens. The party is an impromptu affair and will break up with a supper at Trent's."

"Where did you get this information?" asked Norris jealously. Young Peter Van Dusen was one of the season's best matrimonial catches.

"Never mind. It is sufficient that I have good authority for what I am telling you. If you will simply follow directions and ask no questions, I think I can arrange for you to meet Granya Howe sometime during the evening. In the meantime, I have just fifteen minutes to speak to Arlita Farrell."

McKelvie presented his tickets at the door, whispered something to the usher, and sped down the side aisle to a curtained entrance which bore in heavy black letters the warning, "No Admittance."

McKelvie parted the curtains, crossed a passageway and mounted the wooden steps that led back-stage. Norris, following blindly found himself in a new world of painted scenes and canvas houses where illusion took the place of stark reality.

Several scene-shifters looked up curiously from their tasks as the young men crossed the stage, but no one attempted to bar their progress. A turn to the right and McKelvie paused before a door marked with a large black star. He lifted his hand to knock and remained arrested in the act.

In the deeper shadows of the passage a young man was standing, a young man in evening-dress who eyed them with a bored expression on his handsome, boyish face.

"A stage Johnny?" whispered Norris as McKelvie drew him out of sight behind a sheltering prop.

"No. Peter Van Dusen. What the dickens is he doing here?" McKelvie frowned as he peered at the young clubman. "He acts as though he were waiting for some one. He's surely not going to miss ——"

Norris failed to hear the rest of the sentence. The door of the star's dressing-room swung open, revealing the slender figure and auburn curls of Granya Howe as she stood, one hand on the knob of the door, half-turned toward the invisible occupant of the room.

"I am speaking as a friend, my dear," came in drawling accents the sweet, husky voice of Arlita Farrell. "Don't, under any circumstances, do anything so foolish again."

"I won't, indeed I won't. Why are you so kind to me?" asked Granya Howe softly.

"I am not kind. You wouldn't understand, if I told you. Go, now, please," replied the voice.

Granya Howe shut the door behind her slowly. "Peter," she called. "Where are you?"

The young man emerged from the shadows and offered the girl his arm. "Ready to go now, Granya? Why, you're actually trembling." His voice grew roughly tender. "What did that woman want of you, anyhow?"

"Nothing, Peter. I — I'm all right. If we don't hurry, we'll be frightfully late for the dance."

When the sound of their steps had died away, McKelvie walked out into the passage.

"I'm hanged if I can figure out what this move means. The more we learn, the more tangled this case grows. What's your opinion, Phil?"

Norris had no opinion. He was too stunned and bewildered to think clearly. McKelvie, the investigator, was intrigued by the acquaintance between Arlita Farrell and Granya Howe. Norris, being very much in love, cared only for the fact that Granya had seemed on very friendly terms with Peter Van Dusen.

At McKelvie's postponed knock, the door was opened by a trim maid. McKelvie presented his card.

"Tell your mistress that the matter is very urgent."

A moment later the two men were admitted to the star's presence. She greeted them coldly.

"I can spare but five minutes," she said, glancing from one to the other.

McKelvie introduced himself and his friend. Norris, who had seen this young woman in her stellar rôle, was surprised to find that she was not so beautiful off the stage as on. Her face was too white, her lips too red, her hair too dead and lustreless a black. Yet there was a certain lure about her, the sort that would appeal to a man like his uncle.

While Norris studied the star, McKelvie explained the reason for their call. "You can understand, then, why Mr. Norris is so anxious to solve this murder," he added. "As Mr. Fielding's wife, you should be able to give us valuable information concerning your husband's past life."

Her eyes, the color of agate, hard and cold, fixed themselves on McKelvie's face. "You must be laboring under a delusion. I have never been married. Nor for that matter had I ever heard of Mr. Fielding before reading of his murder in the papers."

McKelvie was nonplussed. He could not very well contradict her. It was possible that the Parisian police had made a mistake. He tried a different tack.

"If I have inadvertently mistaken you for

some one else, I trust you will pardon me. I met your father at the inquest and was instrumental in returning to him the watch he had lost. Do you know whether it was delivered to him?"

"Yes, thank you." She smiled. In the unexpected charming curve of those scarlet lips there was a witchery that set men mad and a mystery which bound them to her side. In such a moment she was irresistible and a man would gladly commit all the crimes in the calendar for her sake.

Both men felt the influence of that smile and both strove to shake it off. McKelvie said sternly, "Were you not at one time acquainted with Andrew Howe?"

The question banished all trace of witchery. There was no charm about her face now. It was cold and unfeeling as she replied, "Again you are mistaken. I did not know any one by that name."

"How is it, then, that you are so friendly with his daughter, Granya?" McKelvie shot at her.

A cold stare and a lift of the pencilled eyebrows. "Really, you carry your impertinence too far. I am under no obligation to answer any of your questions."

"You prefer the notoriety of answering before the coroner?"

Her expression changed, but so rapid was her recovery of her cold, poised manner that only McKelvie's watchful eyes saw the flicker of fear in the glance she directed toward him.

"I have no reason to appear at the inquest, nor am I at all interested in that proceeding. However, I am willing to say this much to oblige you. If you are speaking of the girl who was in here a while ago, I can assure you that she is a perfect stranger to me and that, if her name is Howe, I did not know it until this moment. Now, if you will excuse me, I think you have trespassed long enough upon my time."

After that there was nothing left for the two young men to do but depart. McKelvie's face expressed the chagrin he felt. Norris was amused at their abrupt dismissal.

"I bungled that badly. I might have known she would tell me nothing. I should have been prepared with proofs," remarked McKelvie, shaking his head dismally. "That was stupid of me."

"Why didn't you show her the cable?"

"The police report may be in error. It's hardly likely to prove so, but one can't be too careful about accusing innocent persons. I should have talked to Hirshkoff first before tackling the lady. Having made a mess of

things, we'll try to remedy matters by hearing what her producer has to say about her."

Having secured Hirshkoff's address from the box office, they drove to their destination in somber silence. The only time they spoke was when Norris roused himself to ask, "Do you think that Granya really was a stranger to her?" and McKelvie replied glumly, "I don't know."

The taxi deposited them before the entrance of an imposing apartment house on East Ninety-third Street. The uniformed attendant, after making due inquiries by telephone, directed them to the fifth floor where an inscrutable Jap admitted them to a tastefully furnished library, announcing them in the monotone of the trained servant.

From the depths of a leather arm-chair, Hirshkoff rose to meet them. The great producer was a dapper little man with a shrewd, intelligent countenance and a quick, nervous manner of speech.

"What can I do for you, sir?" he inquired politely of McKelvie.

McKelvie explained his errand.

"What can I tell you about Arlita Farrell?" repeated Hirshkoff, hospitably indicating a box of cigars. "Only just what she sees fit to give out, neither more nor less."

"I understand." McKelvie accepted the invitation to smoke by producing his gold cigarette case. "I'm not partial to cigars," he remarked, as he offered Norris the case, but the latter declined.

"You discovered her in Paris," McKelvie continued. "Before you engaged her to play the lead in your musical comedy you naturally made inquiries about her."

"Naturally," conceded Hirshkoff.

"I have reason to believe that she is in some way connected with the murder I am investigating. Not as a principal," as the producer made a gesture of dissent, "but sufficiently concerned to prove a valuable witness. Neither you nor she, I should imagine, are anxious for notoriety of the sort involved in summoning her before the coroner."

"Decidedly not." Hirshkoff took several quick puffs at his cigar. "Do I understand that unless I tell you what I know you will ask Miss Farrell to testify at the inquest?"

"I have no other option in the matter, Mr. Hirshkoff," replied McKelvie quietly.

"You put me in a difficult position, Mr. McKelvie," said Hirshkoff presently. "What little I know was told me for a particular reason." He hesitated, then added with an air

of conscious triumph, "Last night Miss Farrell promised to become my wife and she disclosed her history because she felt I was entitled to a knowledge of the facts."

"In that event, of course, I cannot ask you to betray a confidence," returned McKelvie. "If I had known this, I should not have taken up your time."

Hirshkoff waved him back to his chair. "There is no need for such hurry. I am sure that if Arlita were here she would want me to speak rather than risk notoriety. I ask only one thing. Can you assure me that what I tell you will not be published in the papers?"

"Yes. Neither of us is connected with the police or the press. Whatever you divulge will be considered of a confidential nature unless the information is of such a character that justice demands its disclosure."

Hirshkoff sank back with a relieved smile. "There is nothing that reflects against Miss Farrell in any form. She is the daughter of John Thurston Farrell and resides in Gramercy Park East with her father. Six years ago she inherited some money from an old creditor of her father's. She employed the money to further her ambition. Three years she spent in study with various masters before she appeared in

Paris where she was all the rage (for her daring as much as for her dancing) until I induced her to come with me in my production. The show has been running a year and it is just as popular as when it first opened on Broadway.

"All this, of course, is common property," he continued between puffs of his cigar. "Now I come to the more personal element. It seems that Mr. Farrell was in the penitentiary for a number of years."

"Ah," interrupted McKelvie, "that explains the deadness of his skin. What was the charge against him?"

"Embezzlement, I think. At least that was what was hinted and I did not like to appear too inquisitive. Besides, what is the use of raking up old skeletons? I like Mr. Farrell. I care really nothing for what he may have done in the past."

"How long was he in prison?"

"I don't know. Quite a few years I believe."

"Who was the creditor who made Miss Farrell his legatee?"

"A man by the name of Andrew Howe," replied Hirshkoff with engaging frankness.

CHAPTER XVIII

THE SUPPER PARTY

ON the heels of Hirshkoff's reply followed a long pause. Both McKelvie and Norris were recalling Arlita Farrell's denial of all knowledge of Andrew Howe.

"Are you positive about that name?" asked McKelvie breaking the hiatus.

"Yes, I am quite sure that was the name she gave me. He had owed her father money for a good many years and they never expected to get it back. When he died he bequeathed his entire property to her. I suppose he thought that she would make better use of it than her father."

McKelvie rose. "Thank you. I don't suppose that it will be at all necessary for me to use the information you have given me. At any rate, I shall give Miss Farrell a chance to tell me the truth herself."

"I wish you would. I am sure she will not object when the circumstance is explained to her. If I can be of service in any other way, you know where to find me."

"Thank you. Good evening, Mr. Hirshkoff."

"Good evening, gentlemen," responded the producer, bowing them out.

"So," commented McKelvie when they reached the sidewalk. "The wind is changeable. First it blows hard from one quarter, then from another. I must try to find out something about Andrew Howe." He hailed a passing taxi and gave the address of the theater from which they had come.

"Are you going back to interview Arlita Farrell again?" inquired Norris, surprised.

"No. There is no point in supping at Trent's before eleven. We might as well kill time at the theater as anywhere."

McKelvie had bought box seats. As it happened they had the loge to themselves. Norris, who had seen the show, sat back in the shadows and revolved in his mind the day's accumulation of evidence.

They had done so much since morning, interviewed so many different persons, heard so many contradictory versions, that his brain was utterly fagged with the effort to straighten out the confused mass of testimony within his grasp. He tried to sort the facts as one sorts the jumbled pieces of some complicated puzzle. Presently he gave up the attempt and turned to

his companion who was enjoying himself hugely.

Norris marvelled at his friend's ability to detach his mind so completely from the affair on hand, and said so.

"The instinct of self-preservation, Phil," responded the other, his eyes on the stage. "I have learned the trick of snapping off the current of my thoughts and turning them at will into new channels that I may retain my sanity. I have discovered through bitter experience that no good can come from wearing down one's reserve trying to fathom the unfathomable. Tomorrow's investigation may clear up much that is now obscure."

"That's all well and good for you," muttered Norris. "You look at the affair cold-bloodedly from a scientific standpoint. Whereas I — well, I shall never know another moment's peace until I learn the truth about Granya Howe."

"She's a petite little thing," was the absent answer as Arlita Farrell appeared for the third time before the curtain to receive her nightly ovation. "Quite engaging from this distance, although I don't think I should fancy being her husband. Her eyes are too hard. Life to her is a sordid affair, a matter of dollars and cents very likely."

Norris leaned forward to watch, observed

Arlita Farrell fling a kiss toward the third box from the stage and turned to see whom she had thus honored. With a courtly bow the tall, distinguished occupant of the box acknowledged the salute. As the favored one resumed his seat, Norris recognized John Thurston Farrell.

"Some one remarked a while ago that he comes every night as regularly as clock-work to receive that kiss with its attendant round of applause," murmured McKelvie. "Poor chap! After his years of confinement even this pitiful measure of adulation is balm to his starved soul."

It was nearing eleven when McKelvie suggested departure. At the entrance to the theater he paused long enough to put a question to the doorman.

"Was Mr. Farrell at the theater last night and the night before?" inquired McKelvie.

"Yes, sir. He hasn't missed a night since the show was opened. Comes at eight-thirty and leaves at eleven," replied the man, with an indulgent smile. "Taxi, sir?"

"Yes. Tell the driver to drop us at Trent's." McKelvie thanked the doorman with a generous tip.

As the taxi threaded its way slowly through the maze of theater traffic on Broadway, McKelvie remarked with a twinkle, "If I must, I must.

Go ahead and talk if you want to, Phil. What's troubling you now."

Norris smiled wearily. "Everything. Do you intend to speak to Granya tonight?"

"Certainly. She cannot involve herself in the mystery and expect immunity from investigation."

"Don't forget that she is innocent."

"That remains to be proved, my friend," retorted McKelvie, coolly.

Norris had never dined at Trent's but he knew the place by reputation as a high-class restaurant of all but prohibitive prices, patronized almost exclusively by the younger members of certain families whose names had long graced the pages of New York's social register.

At McKelvie's request an obsequious waiter conducted them to a secluded table where they could observe all that passed without appearing too flagrantly curious. In the opposite mirror Norris caught a fleeting glimpse of Granya's clear-cut profile. Casually he glanced across the dining-room.

Under the tropical verdure of palm and banana tree a dozen or so youngsters were holding high carnival, entertained by the antics of one of the group who held himself a wit. Norris ignored the crowd and had eyes only for Granya

seated at the head of the table beside Peter Van Dusen.

Unconsciously the chemist noted how exactly her silk gown matched her eyes, eyes that showed too plainly the effort she was making to appear unconcerned. Though she laughed with the rest, her mind was not on her surroundings. As the supper progressed she became more distrait. Several times Van Dusen had to awaken her to a sense of her obligations when she would rouse herself to be entertaining for a few moments and then lapse into an unaccustomed silence again.

Norris sighed. He wished he had the right to comfort her, to stand between her and whatever was making her unhappy.

When the party showed signs of breaking up, McKelvie pencilled a few lines on his card and called the waiter.

"Will you give this to the young lady in the blue dress at the head of that table, please," he requested.

Norris, watching apprehensively, saw Granya read the message with a puzzled frown — saw Van Dusen take the card from her fingers and examine it critically. There was a whispered conference between them — a wordy argument in which the girl carried the day. Van Dusen

moodily sped his parting guests who trailed out hilariously.

When only Granya and her host were left, sitting solitary amidst the remnants of the feast, McKelvie and Norris rose leisurely from their table and crossed the restaurant to Van Dusen's side. When greetings and introductions were over, Granya spoke softly.

"You wished to speak to me about — about something of importance?" she asked, looking from Norris to McKelvie with wondering eyes in which there was the merest trace of uneasiness.

"I'd much prefer to talk to you alone, Miss Howe, if I may," replied McKelvie significantly.

Van Dusen interrupted violently. "I promised Miss Marietta Howe to keep Granya with me all evening. Whatever you have to say, will be said in my presence or not at all."

McKelvie shrugged. "As you please," he said, indifferently.

Granya exclaimed indignantly, "Really, Peter, you are absurd. I am perfectly capable of taking care of myself." She met Norris' troubled glance and read his message. "I think, Peter, that you had better leave us alone."

Van Dusen scowled. "I promised your aunt ——" he began stubbornly.

Granya broke in impatiently, "I don't care.

If you're so suspicious, sit down at that next table where you can watch our every gesture. I'm sorry, Peter," contritely as he flushed angrily. "I didn't mean that."

She put her hand on his arm and the tears came to her eyes. "Forgive me. I'm upset. I — I don't know what I'm saying."

"Will it make you any happier to talk to these gentlemen alone?" asked Van Dusen, covering the little hand with his own.

She nodded.

"All right. I'll be back in ten minutes." He took his hat and coat and strolled off in the direction of the door.

Norris, who had been miserably conscious of Van Dusen's proprietary manner, heaved a sigh of relief. He drew his chair closer and spoke in a low tone.

"I'm sorrier than I can tell you for having distressed you. Please believe that I am your friend and that my only desire is to aid you."

She rewarded him with a smile that softened adorably the lovely mouth. Then she turned to McKelvie. "What was it that you wanted of me?"

"I presume you are aware of the fact that I am investigating the murder of Mr. Norris' uncle?" inquired McKelvie seriously.

"Yes." Her eyes widened perceptibly. She glanced quickly at Norris, then down in her lap.

"The crime was committed with your grandfather's Egyptian dagger. This afternoon he told me that he had given the dagger to you to deliver to Kastamuni, the dealer in antiques. If you will recollect, Mr. Howe asked you in my presence whether you had delivered the dagger. You were very emphatic in your assurance. Now Kastamuni claims that he did not receive the weapon. Miss Howe, think a moment. Are you sure you are not mistaken in saying you gave the Jew the dagger?"

She twisted the ring on her finger round and round. "I am not mistaken," she said at length, very low, while all the bright color drained slowly from her face.

Both men said to themselves, "For some reason she is not telling the truth;" Norris sadly, McKelvie curiously.

"Miss Howe," McKelvie addressed her with grave deliberation, "perhaps this side of the question has not occurred to you. If you did not deliver that dagger, by claiming that you did so, you put an innocent man in a false position. He will probably be accused and arrested for the crime."

She looked up then, startled. "I hadn't

thought," she murmured. "I — I had to say something when granddaddy asked me. I didn't know that it would make trouble."

"Then you didn't deliver the dagger?"

"No. I — I lost it," she whispered unhappily.

Norris shot McKelvie a triumphant glance. "What did I tell you?" was written plainly in his expressive eyes.

"Where did you lose it?"

"I — don't — know," she faltered.

"You must have some idea. Was it near your home or in Gramercy Park?"

She remained silent, her eyes downcast, her hands tightly clasped, her lips set in a stubborn line. McKelvie recognized the symptoms. He changed his plan of attack.

"That is a very curious ring you are wearing. May I see it, please?"

Wonderingly, Granya glanced at McKelvie's grave face. "Why?" she asked, surprised.

"Just a whim of mine. I'm always interested in something that is a little out of the ordinary," he replied quietly.

Slowly she drew the ring off her finger and placed it in his outstretched hand. McKelvie examined it carefully and passed it to Norris.

With sinking heart the chemist saw that he had been right in his assumption that this ring

matched the scarfpin found on his uncle's body. The three tiny clasped hands were identical in shape and size. The lettering in the motto, too, was the same. He glanced inside the heavy gold band, but there was nothing to show to whom the ring had originally belonged. Norris was certain that the ring was a man's.

"Where did you get this ring?" inquired McKelvie as Norris returned the ring to Granya.

"It was my mother's," she answered. "My father gave it to her when she was married."

"Ah," remarked McKelvie with a slight smile, "here comes Mr. Van Dusen, punctual to the minute. One more question before he arrives. How long have you known Arlita Farrell?"

"How long?" echoed Granya. "Why — why I don't know her at all," she said with an unsteady laugh.

"Then what were you doing in her dressing-room tonight?" he asked sternly.

Sudden fear darkened the blue eyes. "Are — are you — do you always know everything?" she faltered, with white lips.

"Unfortunately, not everything," he assured her gravely. "For instance, I don't know why you went to see Miss Farrell."

The color came back with a rush to her blanched face. She drew in her breath sharply

in a strangled half-sob, so great was her relief. She smiled tremulously, as Van Dusen joined them.

“Ready, Granya?” he demanded and promptly took possession of her.

Norris was not to be outdone. He found the opportunity in the midst of the farewells to ask for and receive permission to call the next evening.

As the two men crossed the almost deserted restaurant, McKelvie smiled maliciously. “I must say, Phil, that you’re not slow when once you get started. She must have been impressed by your many attractions to permit you to call so soon.”

“Talk sense, can’t you, Mac?” growled the other irritably.

McKelvie laughed. “You don’t seem elated at the prospect. What’s the matter? A case of funk?”

“No. This cursed crime. If only I knew what Granya has to do with it.”

“You don’t wish it any more fervently than I do,” sighed his companion. “Hang it all, I wish women could be permanently eliminated from a murder investigation. They are always in it up to their ears, and not a thing will they tell you just because they have some foolish

notion that they ought to keep silence. And chivalry forbids the third degree."

He broke off disgustedly as they emerged from the restaurant. Ahead of them a couple stood waiting for their car in the white glare of the fanlight. Norris recognized the dapper figure of the producer, Hirshkoff, and the white, cold profile of his musical comedy star.

McKelvie passed them, appeared to recognize them, turned, bowed. Norris, following his friend's example, restrained with difficulty an exclamation. Arlita Farrell was holding her cape loosely about her and in the bosom of her black dress, rising and falling with every breath she drew, was a gold brooch — three tiny hands joined in friendship's clasp. Norris divined the motto that he could not see.

CHAPTER XIX

THE TESTIMONY OF A HAIR

THAT night Norris slept poorly. McKelvie had refused absolutely to discuss the situation further, returning non-committal answers to all of the chemist's questions concerning Granya Howe's attitude and the significance of the brooch that Arlita Farrell had been wearing.

It was not the star's connection with the case that bothered Norris. Arlita Farrell meant nothing to him. His mind was entirely occupied with thoughts of Granya and what he had learned about her that day. He was tortured by jealousy and doubt.

In the first place he could not bear to recollect that Peter Van Dusen's manner had been markedly proprietary. In the second place he did not like the idea that the Howes should have been as definitely involved in his uncle's past affairs as the cable from Paris had indicated. He was obsessed by a feeling that only ill could come of any acquaintance with Jonas T. Faraday, alias Fielding.

There was always the ugly thought that if

Eldredge Howe had planned the murder in revenge, which McKelvie had suggested as a possibility, the Egyptologist might well have induced Granya to aid him. Norris did not want to believe that this lovely girl whom he had learned to love so quickly and so strangely could have lent herself to so vile a scheme.

To offset this argument, however, there was the aspect that the Egyptologist had been very frank and that he had been very much astonished at the idea of Granya's absence from home. The fact was backed, moreover, by the astounding circumstance of Miss Marietta Howe's fear and her lie to protect Granya from the old gentleman's wrath.

Whereupon a more horrible supposition lifted a hydra head to torment him. Perhaps unknown to her brother, Miss Marietta had been the directing genius of the affair and it had been she who had used Granya as an instrument to carry out her plans for vengeance.

At that point Norris sat up in bed in the dark and pushed the thought from him forcibly. He refused to harbor the idea further.

Morning found the young chemist restless, tossed like a shuttlecock between the battle-dores of doubt and faith in Granya's innocence. Not that his mistrust of the girl lessened his

love for her: if anything, it made him desire all the more fiercely to take her away from the evil influence that apparently surrounded her. Most of all he wanted her to confide in him, not because McKelvie had suggested such a course, but because he could then be certain that she trusted him sufficiently to let him aid her.

He made up his mind to observe her words and actions that evening when he called upon her.

As he could not altogether neglect his work, Norris was obliged to phone McKelvie to go ahead in his investigations without him. Though he went dutifully to his office, Norris' mind was not on his work, but entirely taken up with wondering what McKelvie was doing and what progress he was making and whether Williams had discovered Granya's connection with the mystery.

The chemist was thinking upon these questions that afternoon as he worked in his laboratory over a new formula which should have absorbed his entire attention. Presently through the thread of his thoughts was woven a deeper pattern, an audible rumbling that grew even louder and carried with it a conviction of familiarity.

He listened more attentively and finally placed those heavy tones as belonging to Williams. What was the detective doing here in his office? Had he come to spy?

With a flush of resentment Norris rose quickly and opened the door leading into the outer office. On the threshold he paused, astounded. Williams was towering over the desk at which Miss Warner sat, his massive face thrust close to hers. He had evidently been putting her through something very like the third degree for she had cowered back from him and was dabbing her eyes with her handkerchief.

The sight of his secretary's frightened face roused Norris. He strode forward angrily, "If you want information concerning my private affairs, Sergeant," he said hotly, "I'm the one to apply to. I don't confide in my secretary."

Miss Warner, with a last hasty dab of her handkerchief resumed her typing and Williams swung around with a gruffly genial, "Good afternoon, Mr. Norris. I was just inquiring for you."

Norris' eyes expressed their contempt. "What for?" he demanded quickly, suspiciously.

"I came around to find out what you want done with the body of your uncle. We haven't any further use for it."

For a moment Norris was taken aback. He had forgotten that his uncle would have to be buried. Like a vision in another life came the memory of his oath. His fingers mechanically searched for and found the tiny vial his uncle had given him and which still reposed in the left-hand pocket of his vest.

“Would it be possible for me to seal the vault, Sergeant?” he asked. It was more with a view to easing his conscience than of fulfilling his promise that Norris put the question to the officer.

Williams’ shrewd eyes scanned the young chemist’s face attentively as though suspecting a trap. But Norris’ expression was guileless in its very sincerity.

“Police seals are all the seals that will go on that vault until this murder is solved,” remarked the detective ponderously. “What’s the idea, Mr. Norris?”

Norris was too nervous and tired to explain. “I’ll arrange for the funeral,” he said. After all, what did it matter where his uncle was buried? A man like Jonas Faraday deserved no particular consideration.

Seeing that Norris made no move to return to his laboratory, Williams lumbered away disappointedly. Norris turned to his secretary.

“What did that detective want, Miss Warner?”

“I don’t know. He was asking all kinds of questions about you,” answered the young woman. “And when I — I wouldn’t answer, he — he threatened to arrest me.” She fell to weeping again.

Tears distressed Norris. He had no idea how to cope with weeping women. His instinct was to flee.

“If he ever comes again, just call me,” he said hastily and retreated to his laboratory.

But he couldn’t settle down to work again. Restlessly he paced the white-tiled floor. What did Williams’ visit portend? Had the seed of suspicion sprung like a beanstalk overnight into a robust vine of certainty? Was the detective toying with the idea of arresting him, he wondered.

Norris ran his fingers through his hair and a worried crease appeared between his eyes. To be sent to jail would not suit his book at all. He was not troubled at the thought of spending a few days in the Tombs. He was fretting because his arrest would interfere with his plans for seeing Granya Howe.

Unable to work, he decided to return home. Then it occurred to him that it might be as well

to inform McKelvie of Williams' movements; whereupon he drove over to Stuyvesant Square where he found McKelvie in conference with a bullet-headed, ferret-eyed man called Wilkins.

McKelvie greeted Norris with a smile and made light of Williams and his notions.

"I won't let him arrest you, Phil. I may need you myself before we clear up this mystery. Wilkins and I have had a busy morning. I have been sending wires to the police of every large city here and abroad in the hope of learning the reason for Farrell's imprisonment."

"Why abroad?" interrupted Norris. "Why not New York?"

"Because there is no record of him here. I spent part of the morning at headquarters. As for cabling to the continent? His wife was French. He might easily have lived abroad."

"I had forgotten. And what did Wilkins learn?"

"He was tracing the watch. Tell Mr. Norris what you found out, Wilkins," ordered McKelvie.

"It ain't much. At least it don't lead nowhere," explained the bullet-headed one. "I took the number to an old watchmaker that knows the game like a book. After a lot of phoning he said to try Tiffany's. I skipped

over there and set them all by the ears looking up old musty files. But we found it. The watch was bought twenty-five years ago, initialed and sent to a man by the name of John Thurston Farrell as a gift."

McKelvie said whimsically, "Another thread snapped. The watch belongs to Farrell and the lock of hair is not Granya Howe's."

"How do you know that?" demanded Norris quickly.

"I compared the piece I kept with the girl's own locks last night. They are the same shade but not the same texture. The hair in the watch is much finer."

"Whose is it then?"

"We'd have to ask Farrell that question," replied McKelvie with a shrug. "Perhaps his wife's; perhaps some one else's. How should I know?"

Norris broke the pause that followed. "What are you going to do now?"

"I'm going to investigate the Howes thoroughly." McKelvie smiled oddly. "You notice that I am not asking you to help me, although I know that you will have a splendid chance for observation when you call on Miss Granya Howe tonight."

Norris replied with a sudden lightening of his

sombre expression, "Making a virtue of necessity, eh, Mac?"

McKelvie laughed. "I'm going over in the direction of Gramercy Park. Want to come with me? The expedition might prove of profit."

Instead of stopping at Gramercy Park, however, McKelvie had Norris drive him to Fourth Avenue, where they drew up before the empty house which stood directly back of the row in which Jonas Fielding had his home. This vacant house, a detached two-story frame building, was badly in need of repairs and the winter sunlight, revealing in all its stark ugliness the grimy windows and unswept steps, gave the place a forlorn and dismal aspect.

Finding the weather-beaten front door securely locked, McKelvie made a circuit of the house, examining the basement windows. He was rewarded by discovering that a hole large enough to admit of the passage of a man's hand had been cut in the pane of the rear window and that the window was unfastened.

"That hole has been cut with a diamond," he remarked after inspecting the edge of the glass. "Surely no burglar would take the trouble to break into an empty house." He raised the sash and peered into the dim interior. "Might as well have a look around." McKelvie

swung his feet over the sill of the narrow aperture and dropped.

Norris, to whom the experience of breaking into a house in broad daylight was a new one, glanced about cautiously. He was startled to encounter a pair of bright eyes peeping at him from behind the muslin curtains of an upper story window in the opposite row.

"There's some one watching us, Mac," he warned.

McKelvie called back with a chuckle, "I have no objection. Come ahead, Phil. We have enough to worry over without troubling about inquisitive neighbors."

Without more ado Norris swung himself through the window and lowered it behind him. In the murky light that came through the dusty panes he made out that McKelvie was bending over an object that resembled a heap of brown sacking.

"What have you got there?" he asked.

"See if you can open the basement door, Phil," was McKelvie's answer. "A little more light would be very acceptable."

Norris crossed to the steps that led to the yard and mounted them. A rusty sliding catch which had been recently oiled secured the wooden door. Without much difficulty he shot

back the bolt and pushed open the door. Then he turned expectantly and paused, too astonished to utter a word.

A ray of sunlight had exposed to view the object of McKelvie's scrutiny, the musty brown figure of the missing mummy.

McKelvie touched the bundle of wrappings with his foot.

"I thought so. I had an idea we might find the missing mummy here."

Norris descended slowly. "How did you deduce that fact?"

"I made up my mind yesterday that the lock had been changed after Coster left the wooden box containing the mummy case in this back yard. In order to hide in the outer box, the criminal had first to dispose of the mummy and its coffin. What was easier than to utilize this vacant house?"

A hasty search disclosed the gilded coffin, a replica of the one that Eldredge Howe had shown them with such pride, flung aside in one corner, scratched and scored, as though it had been thrown down with careless disregard of its value.

"Too bad," said Norris as he examined the lid. "I suppose Mr. Howe would give his right hand to own that coffin. For my part I can see

no beauty in the thing. Are you going to leave it here?"

"Might as well. It is of no further value to us. Unless you want to remove it, Phil. I suppose that all your uncle's belongings are now yours or your mother's."

"I don't want the thing," returned Norris hastily. "It is too gruesome a reminder of the tragedy."

"Strange how things work out," continued McKelvie musingly as he searched the basement for further clues. "The only person who seems to have had a motive for the crime is now cleared by the evidence of this coffin. Eldredge Howe is a true collector. His passion for Egyptian antiquities is such that he would sooner imperil his life than scratch even a corner of that mummy case. It is utterly unthinkable that he could have thrown that coffin in here so indifferently."

"What about his sister?" asked Norris slowly. "But, no, she is much too frail to have been able to handle this mummy case."

McKelvie glanced at Norris curiously. "I thought the same myself a while ago. What particular reason have you for suspecting her?"

"None at all," replied Norris quickly. "Just my imagination running away with me. I'm

getting so that I suspect everybody," he ended peevishly.

McKelvie paused near the window through which they had entered. "Hello, what's this?" He picked up a tangled mass of clothes-line and held it out before him.

In several places the rope was knotted as though it had been used to fasten some large object. The loose ends were frayed as though they had been severed by a jagged surface. These ends were also slightly stained with blood and in one of the knots a single auburn hair had become entangled.

McKelvie carefully removed the hair and placed it in his wallet. "Whoever cut that rope managed to injure himself, or more than likely herself. I wonder whether Granya Howe has a cut finger? That auburn hair is undoubtedly hers."

Before Norris could voice an indignant protest the basement was darkened by the unexpected closing of the door. Both young men whirled simultaneously, as though moved by one common impulse, to see the bulky form of a policeman descending the steps.

At the same instant a sharp, wizened face appeared at the window and a shrill, excited voice exclaimed, "That's them. Don't let them

escape. They're sharp ones, Officer. I just know they'll be murdering us in our beds next."

Norris, who did not relish the idea of being taken to court, drew back into the shadows. The situation, however, appeared to amuse McKelvie. He took a couple of steps toward the policeman, slipping his hands nonchalantly into his overcoat pockets as he moved.

The policeman, who could not distinguish features in the vague light and who was taking no chances, drew his gun and roared, "Hands up or I'll shoot."

"Really, Gordon," said McKelvie in a pained voice, "you surprise me. Don't you know that I have a rooted objection to holding up my hands in that aimless fashion? Besides," with a chuckle, "if it came to a showdown, my gun, though invisible, is quite as capable of damaging your uniform as yours might be to wound my august person."

"Mr. McKelvie!" The words were a gasp. Gordon remained petrified with his jaw hanging limp.

"And Mr. Norris, too," added McKelvie. "What charge are you going to prefer against us? I'm curious to know."

"I don't understand," remarked Gordon, pocketing his gun as he slowly recovered his wits.

"Mrs. Perkins said you were the same men who had broken in here the night before the murder."

"So they are," declared the tart voice outside, whose owner had been listening at the hole in the window pane.

"Tell her to come in here," whispered McKelvie eagerly. "She may know something. This place was broken into on the night you mention."

Gordon mounted the steps to the door, opened it and called. When the face had disappeared from the window, McKelvie asked in a low tone, "Who is she?"

"A Mrs. Perkins. She lives two doors from the house in which the murder occurred. An awful busybody, always stirring up trouble. Knows more about you than you do yourself—"

The words ended in a growl as an angular figure in an old gray coat darkened the doorway. Under a frowsy boudoir cap a pair of bright eyes peered at them vindictively.

"Come in, Mrs. Perkins," invited Gordon.

"Is it safe, Officer?" she squeaked. "Have you got the handcuffs on?"

Ponderously Gordon explained the situation, whereupon Mrs. Perkins entered with a crest-fallen air.

"Well, anyhow," she said in justification, "I

did see two men in the yard and one of them climbed in that winder about two a.m., three nights ago.”

“That’s what I am anxious to learn,” declared McKelvie with his best smile. “How did you happen to see them, Mrs. Perkins?”

Nothing gave Mrs. Perkins greater pleasure than a chance to retail such facts as she had been able to glean throughout the day. To number among her listeners a private investigator and the nephew of the recently murdered man swelled her meagre bosom with inordinate pride. Volubly she burst into speech.

“It was like this,” she explained. “My room is at the back on the third floor. Three nights ago I couldn’t sleep. No, that ain’t right,” with a jerk of the bobbing head. “It was the couple in the next room to me that woke me up coming in late.”

“Then you live in a boarding house?” inquired McKelvie.

“Yes, and it ain’t all it’s cracked up to be either. Why I said to Mrs. Neal only the other day ——”

“I know,” interrupted McKelvie who had no wish to hear what Mrs. Perkins had said to Mrs. Neal. “You were telling us about the men you saw ——”

“I’m telling you, ain’t I?” she demanded indignantly. “And I said to Mrs. Neal, I said, ‘I wouldn’t stay here another minute the food is that bad only that — well, they do give you the room cheap and I ain’t as young as I once was to be moving around from post to pillar.’ That’s just what I said to Mrs. Neal. And she said to me ——”

McKelvie glanced at Norris with a resigned sigh and an expression that conveyed the message, “Did you ever hear such an old bore, but I suppose I shall have to stand it, if I want to learn what she really knows.” Norris turned away to hide his smile, as Mrs. Perkins went on to retail at great length just what Mrs. Neal had said in reply.

At length, having rambled through most of the gossip of the boarding-house, Mrs. Perkins returned to the night before the murder when the noisy couple next door had awakened her at one o’clock.

“I saw that I had insomny, so I got me a chair and looked out the winder. I can see the lights of Fourth Avenue and it makes it cheery-like. While I was watching I discovered a light in this back-yard. I knew the house was empty, so I hung out the winder and looked. I could see two figgers and one of them had a —— You

know. A what-you-may-call-'em that burglars carry in the moving pictures."

"A flashlight," suggested McKelvie.

"That's it," she continued eagerly. "The name sort of slipped my mind. Well, one of them had a flashlight and he was bending over something, but I couldn't tell what. Then he gave the flashlight to the other one who was shorter. Then they went over to the winder and the taller one did something or other and opened it, and climbed in. Pretty soon he came out the door there. Then they put out the flashlight and I could see them moving around like shadows, but I couldn't tell what they were doing. After that they disappeared entirely."

"You didn't catch a glimpse of their features by any chance?" asked McKelvie when Mrs. Perkins paused for breath.

"No. They didn't put the flash on each other. But next morning I went out and around and had a look at the place, but I couldn't see nothing wrong. The back door was locked and the winder was fastened. I couldn't see nothing or hear nothing, so I guessed maybe I was mistaken and had kinda dreamed the thing. I told Mrs. Neal and she said to me she said, 'It was them onions you had for supper.'"

"Very likely," muttered McKelvie.

"But when I seen you climb in the winder this time, I was suspicious-like, seeing that there had been a murder so close and all. I wasn't taking no chances this time. So I put on my coat, just as I was, and went for the policeman."

"When you examined the house that next morning, did you notice whether there was a hole in the window pane?" demanded McKelvie.

"No, I didn't. You see it was snowing quite hard then and I didn't stop long."

"Thank you, Mrs. Perkins. If you chance to see any one breaking in here again, just let us know," returned McKelvie. He nodded at Gordon who, taking the hint, diplomatically led the reluctant Mrs. Perkins away.

"We can definitely say then," remarked Norris as McKelvie locked the door and they left the basement through the window, "that the criminal changed the lock on the box and hid the mummy and its coffin in this empty house, in the early morning hours of the day of the crime."

"And hid himself in the box. Don't forget that, Phil," responded McKelvie. "The only question is, Was Granya Howe in the box with him?"

"Mac!" exclaimed Norris aghast, turning a horrified face toward his companion.

“Look at the thing in the light of cold reason, Phil. We find traces of her presence in that basement. The auburn hair, remember. You encountered her in the drug store directly the murder had been committed. She was away from home for almost twenty-four hours, from eight the night before until seven or after the night of the crime ——”

“How do you know that?” interrupted Norris indignantly.

“Miss Marietta Howe admitted the fact to me over the phone. I was talking with her this morning,” replied McKelvie calmly. “So you see, Phil, we must ask ourselves, Where was Granya during those twenty-four hours? Don’t forget also that she had the dagger and wears a very incriminating ring.”

But Norris had no use for cold reason. He was in the grip of an emotion that left him despairing and hopeful by turns. He refused to admit anything until he had seen her again that night.

CHAPTER XX

DREAMS AND DOUBTS

AFTER dinner that evening Norris approached the white stone house at the end of the block with beating heart and soaring hopes. At last he was to enjoy the ineffable pleasure of seeing Granya alone. Doubts were submerged beneath his dreams of exquisite happiness.

As he ascended the steps, the door swung open silently, seemingly of its own volition. Somewhat surprised, but accepting this fact as an invitation to enter, the chemist stepped inside.

In the wide hall with its atmosphere of incense he encountered Miss Marietta Howe. She was wearing a black beaded crepe and over her shoulders the same creamy lace shawl that she had worn when he first met her; in one hand she carried a bag of fancy work; with the other she motioned him to follow her.

Considerably puzzled the young man obeyed, becoming more and more mystified as she ushered him into the drawing-room and closed the door carefully upon them.

“ I promised Granya that you should have this chance to see her,” she said then in her mournful voice. “ My brother has forbidden the child to have anything to do with you. He is a hard, unforgiving man, my brother.”

“ Miss Howe,” began Norris, but she held up a trembling hand.

“ No, do not question me. I have wrought enough harm when I admitted her absence from home. I can tell you nothing.” She raised her sunken, faded eyes to his face and he saw with a sudden rush of pity that they were very sad, the mute, mournful eyes of a sorrow-burdened soul.

At this moment, however, the portières at the far end of the salon parted and Granya flashed like a ray of sunlight into the room. In the radiance of her presence Norris forgot the older woman and her troubles. He drew Granya down beside him on the ornate sofa — and became uneasily conscious of the fact that Miss Howe was watching them furtively.

After that when they spoke at all it was of commonplaces. Those faded, ever watchful eyes disturbed the young man. He could not tell the girl what was in his heart with Miss Howe listening to every word.

Once Granya remarked softly, “ Granddaddy

would be very angry if he knew you were here. Fortunately, he went to a lecture tonight."

Norris was quick to seize his chance. "Let me take you for a drive, then," he said, bending towards her. He wanted above all things to get her to himself.

She blushed adorably beneath his ardent gaze, but she made no objection to his proposition. She too was anxious to evade those dim blue eyes.

"I'll have to go home for my car," he returned eagerly. "Just down the block. Will you be ready when I get back?"

She assented. Without consulting her aunt, she escorted Norris to the front door. As he was leaving, she said laughingly, "Yesterday, when I was introduced to you, you acted as though you had seen me before. What made you think so?"

He looked down into her lovely eyes. "Because," he said slowly, "I saw a portrait of you in my uncle's house the day before yesterday. I saw the portrait and a half hour later I saw you yourself crouched in the telephone booth of Hammel's pharmacy."

A look, half-fear, half-wonder, overspread her bright face. "My portrait?" she repeated. "You must be mistaken. I never had my por-

trait painted." But he saw the color drain from her cheeks as he had seen it on a previous occasion.

"She is lying," he said to himself, and added harshly, "It was your portrait. When did you give it to my uncle?"

Granya swept him from head to foot with a proudly withering glance. "Since you seem inclined to doubt me ——"

Her scorn cut him like a whiplash. What a fool he was to suspect her. He must have been mad even to think of such a thing as collusion between this girl and his uncle. Norris caught her hand pleadingly.

"Forgive me," he cried. "I—I did not mean to doubt you. I don't know what made me say such a thing. It's this blamed affair that sets us all suspecting one another," he floundered miserably.

Perhaps she recalled that she had erred only the night before in a similar way. At any rate she had compassion on his distress.

"Please say no more about it. It doesn't matter in the least," she answered and smiled forgivingly.

When he returned with his car, Granya was waiting for him. She was standing in the hall before a long, narrow Florentine mirror, ad-

justing the collar of her sable coat. The sight of that garment re-aroused Norris' doubts.

To escape the thoughts that rose like a swarm of midgets to torment him, he drove swiftly, silently along the snow-banked streets until they had crossed Manhattan Square. Then he turned into Central Park and drove back slowly to the lily pond. Gently he asked her to alight. She obeyed without a word.

The night was one of beauty. The deep, dark sky was pointed with a million frosted stars and the frozen pond glimmered like silver fret-work in the streaming light from the car lamps. From the distant lake came faintly, like a phantom echo, the shout of skaters, and the faraway sound only served to emphasize their complete aloofness from the outside world.

Granya turned her rose-tinted face toward him, her breath issuing like a wraith of smoke between her vivid lips. He looked down into the blue depths of her eyes and lost himself completely. He never could account for the rest. All he knew was that she was in his arms, that he was kissing her cold cheeks, her warm, vibrant lips.

Time and space and doubts were swept away. It was only when he held her again in his arms in the wide hall of her home and he felt the

rich softness of her cloak against his cheek that memory returned laden with ghostly horrors that he could not entirely cast aside.

To rid himself of these doubts once for all, he said quickly, "Granya, weren't you in my uncle's house three — no four — nights ago? Don't be afraid to confide in me, dear. You hid in the wooden receptacle and after the murder you slipped out through the open front door. You spoke to the policeman on the corner and later hid again in the telephone booth. You had that coat on."

With sudden strength she pushed him from her. Wild-eyed she looked about the hall, then, on an impulse, she faced him again, her glance steady and unwavering. "I think you must be crazy, Phil, I was ill in bed at the time you mention," she said with dignity. But again he saw her color flutter painfully.

"Why do you persist in denying it, Granya?" he asked unhappily. "I don't care what you have done, but I must end this suspense. I can't stand these torturing doubts. Even if you helped to kill my uncle, it doesn't matter at all. I love you Granya."

She gazed at him with dawning horror in her eyes. "You could think me capable of that?" she whispered.

"No, no," he cried out, realizing all of a sudden the dreadful accusation.

But she was gone. He heard her alternately laughing and sobbing as she fled up the marble stairs.

As he walked slowly, brokenly, toward the door, Miss Marietta appeared before him. She came up to him and caught his arm with her trembling old fingers.

"Do you love her?" she demanded in her distressed voice, her faded eyes searching his face.

Norris was taken aback. Had Miss Howe been spying upon them? What for? Was she his enemy or his friend?

"Of course I love her," he retorted impatiently.

"Really love her, I mean. None of your namby-pamby sort that is frightened off at the least alarm?"

"I'd go through hell for her," said Norris.

The little old lady peered at him a long time. "You may be called on to do so," she said very quietly. "Don't fail her. Whatever happens, don't fail her — if you want to save her."

With which strange prediction Miss Howe vanished. Norris returned home in an anxious frame of mind.

CHAPTER XXI

THE IRREVOCABLE PAST

IF Norris was perturbed the night before, he was even more disquieted the next morning when he was refused admittance to Granya's presence. Man-like, he had soothed himself with the thought that she would forgive him as she had before. But she absolutely declined to see him even for a moment, nor would Miss Howe come down and talk to him.

He drove away feeling like a pariah, cast out into the cold, unfeeling world because he had dared to doubt. That day his work suffered again. He saw that he was in no condition to cope with his experiments and wisely turned the work over to his assistants for a day or two.

That afternoon as he sat moodily in his library, refusing even the small crumbs of comfort which his mother held out, there was a knock at the door and McKelvie walked in, bringing with him a breath of the cold, bracing air. One glance at the disconsolate figure sunk in a chair before the fire was enough for those keen eyes.

"What's wrong, Phil? Have you learned so soon that love is but a dream, a pretty fable with

which we dupe ourselves to our own lasting sorrow?"

Had Norris been less engrossed in his own devastating troubles he would have roused himself to argue with his friend. As it was he merely went on to relate dejectedly the events of the previous evening, mentioning particularly Miss Howe's queer words.

"That woman knows something of this mystery," remarked McKelvie, perching on the edge of the table. "She is afraid, too."

Norris followed moodily his own thread of thought. "What hurts most is her lack of confidence in me. She says she loves me, and yet she deliberately lies to me." He threw out his hands despairingly. "When I am with her all I can think of is my love for her. When I am away from her all my doubts of her grow and grow until their ugly tentacles enfold me and drag me down into horrible depths where all is vile and there is no virtue anywhere."

"Nonsense, Phil. You are letting your imagination run away with you," retorted McKelvie, trying to rouse the chemist from his slough of despond. "If you really love the girl, it follows that you must believe in her. If you mistrust her, you don't love her. You see, it is very simple after all."

Norris rose and began to pace the floor like a restless caged beast. From the depths of bitter experience he smiled tolerantly upon his friend's abysmal ignorance of the subject under discussion.

"You don't know what you are talking about, Mac," he said. "You have never been in love."

McKelvie's twisted smile was lost upon the chemist. Only the flames caught it and whirled its reflection upward in a jagged point of fire.

"Love is the most complex sensation under the sun. It almost seems as though there are times when one can love and hate in the same breath. All I know is that I do love Granya truly and sincerely, love her enough to want to make her my wife; and yet — I have no faith in her. She lied to me, twice, Mac."

"A woman does not look upon a lie with the same horror as a man, Phil. Remember what Miss Howe said. You mustn't fail her," replied McKelvie soberly.

"You have come to the conclusion that Granya is innocent? You have proof——" exclaimed Norris, swinging toward the other with brightening eyes.

"I never said she was guilty. I have no proof of anything. I have a feeling that something is going to happen and I can't just make out what.

However, that's neither here nor there. What I meant was that, unless you believe her innocent, I don't give much for her chances of happiness with you."

Norris gave up trying to explain. "You don't understand. I don't care what she has done. But I want her to tell me herself, to confide in me," he cried out unhappily.

McKelvie tactfully changed the subject. He got down from the table and put his hand on Norris' shoulder. "I came over to get you, Phil, because Fordney wants to see you. He is very anxious to tell what he knows, but he wishes to tell it to you. Jamieson thinks it would be wiser to humor him than to let him fret."

Norris was only too glad to get away from himself and his troubles. Besides, the old servant might be able to clear up a few of the darker points, to shed light on the murder and Granya's connection with his uncle.

"Why do you think something is going to happen?" inquired Norris as he drove McKelvie to Bellevue.

"I don't know. I suppose because things have been quiet for so long. Besides, I seem to make no headway. I'm always running up against blank walls, and every one connected with the

mystery refuses to explain his or her true position. There's Arlita Farrell, for instance. Why does she wear that brooch? And what's the connection between her and Granya and whoever left that scarf pin on your uncle's body?" He sighed impatiently. "One could go on asking questions from now till doomsday without getting any forwarder."

"What about Mr. Farrell? Have you heard from your message yet?" inquired Norris.

"Blanks so far. Evidently he did not serve time in this country."

When they reached Bellevue, they went directly to Fordney's room. Outside the door they were met by Doctor Jamieson, who desired to be present at the interview.

"I cannot permit my patient to over-excite himself, especially as he has already had one visitor today," remarked the head physician.

"Williams?" asked McKelvie quickly.

The older man nodded. "I could not very well keep him away."

They were ushered into a high-ceilinged room, white and bare. Fordney looked like a ghost propped up against his pillows. He smiled a wan greeting as Norris took the feeble hand in his.

"Mr. Phil, I'm glad you've come. I want to

get this burden off my mind. I had hoped to tell you first, sir, but that policeman was here early this morning and made me speak." His voice was a mere, wavering thread.

Norris patted the thin hand. "When you are quite well, there is a place for you in my home," he said kindly.

"Thank you, Mr. Phil. But I have some money saved up. I guess I'll buy a little shack somewhere and take it easy the rest of my life."

Norris sat down beside the bed and the other two men drew up chairs to listen.

"I'll begin when Mr. Faraday first met the Jezebel, because it was then that all the trouble started. That was ten years ago, and your uncle, Mr. Phil, was fifty." Fordney kept his rheumy eyes fastened on Norris' face as though he saw only the young chemist in the room. "He didn't look his age and he was quite a sport and dandy. He could have had his pick of the Parisian ladies, but he had to be taken with the Jezebel. I don't remember what he used to call her."

"Arlita?" suggested McKelvie.

Fordney turned his eyes slowly toward McKelvie. "You have heard this story?" he asked surprised.

"Some of it. But go on. I want all the

details you can give me," answered McKelvie.

"That was her name," continued the old man. "Arlita he always called her when he was pleased. Otherwise he called her different names, ugly ones. She was seventeen at the time, but worldly-wise with hard, cold eyes, and an unfeeling heart. Her hair was quite black and her skin very white. She used to paint her lips a bright red which made her look very queer, like a bad woman, I thought. Your uncle used to like her like that, though, especially when she smiled. He would do anything for her then."

He paused, worn by the unaccustomed exertion. In the silence that followed both McKelvie and Norris were envisioning the smile that Arlita Farrell had bestowed upon them. There were no two women who answered to the description that Fordney had given. So Arlita Farrell, in spite of her denial, had been Jonas Faraday's wife.

Fordney resumed. "This Jezebel was married to a nice youngish sort of man called Andrew Howe. For some reason she disliked her husband, although they had not been married very long. They had a small apartment in one of the less pretentious streets, so I suppose they were quite poor. Anyhow she liked to dress up

very much. Your uncle used to give her lots of jewels."

"How old was Andrew Howe?" interrupted McKelvie.

"About thirty-two or three, I think. Not more than that. Well, one day your uncle, Mr. Phil, took the Jezebel to Nice. They were gone a week. Andrew Howe came to the house, raging mad. I tried to pacify him and he finally wrote your uncle a note and went away. When Mr. Faraday returned he brought the Jezebel home with him. I gave him Mr. Andrew Howe's note. Your uncle read it and laughed sneeringly. I heard him say to her, 'Your fool of a husband wants to fight a duel with me over you,' and he laughed again."

"What answer did she make to that?" inquired Norris.

"She laughed too." He went on in a different tone, "The next morning she came flying to me with a terrified face. Mr. Faraday had gone out early. She was sure he had gone to fight the duel. She wanted me to go with her to her husband's house. I thought she was crazy—because I knew your uncle wouldn't risk his life for any woman—but I went with her. She had a key with her. The house was like a tomb. We crept upstairs and there in the hall

we found Mr. Howe dead with a pistol in his hand. I called the police. The verdict was suicide. I have always wondered if your uncle went to see Mr. Howe. Anyway, when Mr. Howe's will was probated the Jezebel was sole heir to everything."

Fordney lay back exhausted by the recital and the three men exchanged glances.

Norris asked, "Did — did Howe leave any children?"

"I don't know, sir. I never heard of any," answered Fordney in a weak voice.

Jamieson interposed. "I think the rest can keep until tomorrow. You mustn't overdo it."

But Fordney insisted on finishing his story. "There's only a little more. Mr. Faraday married the Jezebel and lived for four years in Paris. Then he and I left suddenly one night. He had all this time been calling himself by the name of Fielding to the outside world. Now he made me call myself Fordney. For a year we went from place to place like hunted animals. As soon as we were settled comfortably, a telegram or cable would come, and off he'd go again like a frightened rabbit.

"Finally we came to New York and I bought the house in Gramercy Park while he stayed in hiding. He had the secret door put in and he

lived in the back in fear for his life for five years. He grew old and broken. Only one thing interested him and that was the treasures in the vault. I bought all those things from Kastamuni under the name of Kramer. The house back on Fourth Avenue was your uncle's too. All the stuff was delivered there and I would move it in under cover of the night."

"The wooden box which contained the mummy case, too?" asked McKelvie.

"Yes, sir. But he helped me with that. It was too heavy for me alone. We had rollers under it and it was quite a job. We brought it in just before dawn. That was the first time he had been outside the house in five years."

"You brought it in through the door in the vault?"

Fordney's eyes expressed surprise. "You know that too, sir? Yes. The door was so fixed that it could only be opened from the inside and only with the key that I had. He took every precaution, Mr. Phil, and yet they got him in the end."

"Who, Forthright?" inquired Norris eagerly. Was the mystery to be solved in the next few words that Fordney uttered?

"I don't know, Mr. Phil. Your uncle never told me anything. But I sort of figured it this

way. A long time ago your uncle and two other men, Howe and some one else, were mixed up together in some enterprise. I don't know what it was, but I think it was from them he was running away. Most of the cables he received during that year had the name Howe in them somewhere. He had something that they wanted, I think. He told me the day he sent me for you, Mr. Phil, that his secret was walled up in the library. If his enemies found him out he was to be revenged. I was to take those papers when he was dead and turn them over to you so you could avenge him, Mr. Phil."

McKelvie leaned forward with sparkling eyes, "What were these papers, Fordney?"

"I didn't have a chance to look for them, sir. But I can tell you where the papers are." He lowered his voice until it was barely audible and the three men had to sit forward to catch his words. "In his library is a book called 'The Philosophy of Epicurus.' Behind that book is a panel. If you press the panel exactly in the center a door will open. In the recess you will find his secret." The old man spoke very slowly, as though he were repeating a lesson he had conned.

"Did you mention any of this to Williams?" asked McKelvie somewhat anxiously.

“No, sir. I did not mention the hiding-place nor the secret. The detective only asked me about Mr. Eldredge Howe and whether he had known my master. I said I thought so, since Mr. Andrew Howe was his son.”

McKelvie raised his brows. “So. I wonder where Williams obtained that lead? By the way, what became of Mrs. Faraday?”

“She went with us as far as England. Then she and Mr. Faraday had a row of some sort. I understood that she left him for some one else after that.”

“Did Mr. Faraday leave a will?”

“No, sir, but I know that he intended leaving everything to Mr. Phil. He said so, often.”

That was the sum and substance of what Fordney could tell them. Further questioning elicited nothing of value. Doctor Jamieson had risen, considering the interview as ended, when Norris unexpectedly roused himself from his musing.

“Whose portrait was that in the corridor?” he demanded.

“Miss Granya’s, Mr. Phil,” replied Fordney simply.

“Granya’s!” echoed Norris stupidly. He was stunned by this proof of the girl’s perfidy. “Was she — could she have been ——?” he

stammered, unable to put the hateful thought into words.

"What did you say, Mr. Phil?" queried the sick man.

"Mr. Norris wants to know just who Miss Granya is," interposed McKelvie, quickly.

Fordney smiled. "Why, don't you know, Mr. Phil? She was your cousin."

"You mean that — that she is Uncle Jonas's daughter?" exclaimed Norris, hesitatingly and unwillingly.

Fordney nodded. "I suppose you wouldn't know, though. She was a beautiful young lady, Mr. Phil, and so good-hearted."

"Why do you say 'was?'" inquired McKelvie abruptly. "Is she dead?"

"Yes, sir. She died a good many years ago, twenty at least."

Norris passed a dazed hand across his brow. "I don't understand," he murmured.

"The thing is simplicity itself," explained McKelvie. "We have been talking at cross purposes. The portrait is not that of Granya Howe."

Fordney caught the swiftly spoken words. "No, sir. Her name was Granya Faraday. It never was anything else but that."

"You are sure?" Norris grasped the thin

old hand convulsively as a sudden conviction assailed him. "Did she never marry?"

"I'm sure, Mr. Phil. No, she didn't marry. She was away at boarding-school in Paris most of her life. Mr. Faraday lost his wife when Miss Granya was about five or so. Then, when she was about nineteen she became ill and the doctors ordered her to the country. She only lived a year after that, Mr. Phil. She was never very strong."

"But, the portrait is dedicated to her husband," said Norris perplexed.

"Is that so, Mr. Phil? I didn't know that. She didn't know any men unless it was the artist that painted the picture."

"Who was the artist?" demanded McKelvie as Norris lapsed into silence. "And how did it happen that he painted her portrait?"

"She used to spend her holidays with us sometimes. When she was seventeen she met a young artist, a Mr. Trevor. He insisted on painting her picture. He was giving an exhibit or something. Mr. Faraday consented. He was so proud of her, Mr. Phil. But she was never alone with the young man. Always her father and sometimes I was in the room. When she died, Mr. Faraday brought the picture home."

“How does it happen that Mr. Faraday’s sister did not know he was married?”

“When he was eighteen, he ran away from home, sir, and his family cast him off. When he was twenty he married in England and remained there until his wife died. Though he saw his sister occasionally, sir, he was not really on good terms with her. He was too proud to tell her anything of his affairs.”

Norris mentally honored the old fellow for standing up for his master, even though the latter had been a blackguard.

McKelvie broke the pause, “Was Miss Faraday’s hair fine or coarse, Fordney?”

Fordney replied in genuine astonishment, “Very fine, sir. Fine and long, almost down to her feet.”

CHAPTER XXII

BEHIND THE PANEL

It was late when they drove away from the hospital. The gray sky had grown duller and the wind was wailing dismally around the bleak buildings which they had just quitted. At McKelvie's suggestion, Norris headed for Gramercy Park.

"We might as well secure those documents that Fordney mentioned. They might prove to contain the information we are seeking."

"Can it be mere coincidence that Granya should so resemble that portrait of another girl?" Norris meditated, his thoughts on the one topic that held any interest for him.

McKelvie replied emphatically, "Of course, it isn't coincidence. Granya is an unusual name. That strangers should bear the same name and look exactly alike would be stretching things too far. No, they are mother and daughter, Phil."

"Then Granya Howe is my cousin? My uncle's granddaughter? But what is her real name?"

"You are asking something that I cannot

answer," responded McKelvie thoughtfully. "Odd that Eldredge Howe, hating your uncle, should harbor his enemy's grandchild ——. By Jove, I begin to see daylight. Why, of course."

Norris said irritably, "What is of course?"

"Nothing. I have a bad habit of talking to myself. Do you know, Phil, that I was totalling results last night. The net result is negligible. We have acquired a tremendous amount of information without having progressed very far. We are like travellers in the desert who see before them the end toward which they are moving, only to find when they reach it that it is a mirage of the sands."

Norris nodded without replying.

McKelvie continued his analysis of the case. "Summed up briefly we have the following facts. Mr. Faraday was murdered by some one whom he had injured, this some one entering the house by hiding in the wooden box from which the mummy and its case had been removed. The murderer employed a weapon belonging to Eldredge Howe, but which was last known to have been in Granya Howe's possession. This unknown also left behind him a scarf pin of peculiar make whose symbology is duplicated in Granya's ring and Arlita Farrell's brooch."

"If we could learn the significance of the scarf pin," hinted Norris.

"If we could. My dear boy, I have Wilkins on the trail of that. Without the pin itself the task is one of almost insurmountable difficulty. But to go on. Both Granya Howe and Arlita Farrell are keeping back what they know of this mystery. Also they appear to be in collusion. Then Mr. Farrell evidently carries in his watch a lock of Miss Faraday's hair. I am just wondering whether he might not have been the artist Trevor."

"Don't. These conjectures are driving me wild," begged Norris. "If only I could clear up the mystery surrounding Granya, if only I could learn what she had to do with the case, I wouldn't care twopence who killed my uncle."

McKelvie sighed. "That's the trouble. All we have are conjectures. Every lead ends in a blank wall. Granya herself is a blank wall. Without actual proof one cannot accuse a gentleman and his sister of complicity in the crime. And if Miss Marietta, who seems favorably inclined toward you, refuses to tell you anything, she is hardly likely to give me her confidence unless I can bring pressure to bear upon her." McKelvie was musing aloud, his companion forgotten. "It's all a hopeless tangle. We are

picking our way through a labyrinth of apparently motiveless acts and we unfortunately have no Ariadne's clue to guide us."

They drew up before the decrepit house in Gramercy Park West and, while Norris covered the hood of his car, McKelvie ran up the decaying steps, the keys that he had used before dangling from his hand and jingling clearly in the cold air like tuneful bells.

In the enclosed park the bare branches of the trees etched themselves darkly against the dull gray sky like gaunt, supplicating arms; and, seeing them, Norris shivered as he had shivered that first evening when he had come to this house of horrors. He had a distinct premonition of evil. He felt that the house was about to reveal insidious mysteries, secrets walled up within its dark and mouldering foundations, dead things in ghastly cerements whose very disclosure would undermine his sanity. He shuddered again as he watched McKelvie fumbling with the lock of the grated entrance.

The scene was so very similar to that previous one that Norris would not have been surprised if Officer Gordon had challenged them out of the gloom. But no measured tread disturbed the silence of the street. The stillness was broken only by a low whistle from McKelvie.

“Hello,” said the latter softly, “this lock has been tampered with, Phil.” He pushed open the door and entered the vestibule. “And this one is smashed,” he added, examining the lock of the inner door by the light of his flash. “It looks very much as though some one had broken into the place.”

“The treasures in the vault,” exclaimed Norris. “Those Egyptian antiquities are of sufficient value to arouse the cupidity of the professional burglar.”

As they hurried down the hall, the chemist added, “I thought the police were still guarding the house.”

“Gordon patrols the beat. I suppose that Williams considered the place sufficiently protected.”

They crossed the small corridor and found the wall open. Norris recalled that it had not been closed since the police had taken charge. When they reached the vault, McKelvie descended the steps alone. He was not affected by its tomb-like interior and its phantom-haunted atmosphere. But his flash revealed no change. Nothing had been displaced. Even the painted box stood with its lid open as Williams had left it.

McKelvie mounted the steps, frowning. “Whoever was in this house was certainly not

bent on robbery ——” He broke off with an inaudible exclamation and sprang down the passage to the door of the library.

On the threshold, Norris, who had followed closely, paused, astounded. The beautiful old room was a wreck. In the rays of the flash he could see that furniture had been overturned, that the drawers of the desk and table had been pulled out and their contents strewn over the floor.

McKelvie located the switch for the overhead lights. In the more brilliant illumination the scene of desolation was enhanced. Ornaments worth thousands had been smashed regardless of value. Chair cushions had been ripped open. The paper had been torn from the walls. Many of the books had been pulled from the shelves and were lying in tatters on the carpet.

Both men simultaneously sought and found the volume that Fordney had mentioned. There it stood, untouched as yet, guarding the secret that these vandals had ransacked the room to discover. They had evidently just begun upon the bookshelves when they were disturbed, for only the bottom tier had been denuded.

McKelvie strode across the room and put out a hand to grasp “The Philosophy of Epicurus.”

Then he snatched back his fingers as though a viper had stung him.

“Wired,” he said succinctly. “Where the devil do you suppose the control is?”

He searched the room with a quick glance, then he picked up a gutta-percha ruler from the debris on the floor. After switching off the light he touched the book gingerly with the hard rubber.

“This switch does not affect the current,” he said, turning on the electrolier again. “If I had a pair of strong rubber gloves, I’d risk pulling Mr. Epicurus from his moorings. As it is, I’m not keen on taking a journey across the Styx.”

“You could not go in a worthier cause, Mac,” replied Norris, momentarily infected by the other’s mood.

“Afraid I can’t oblige you, Phil. Life still holds a few thrills for me.” While McKelvie talked those keen eyes of his darted here and there over the walls. “The window is wired, too, so that it’s probable that the wires go through to the ground.” He dropped on his knees and began to sound the boarding. “What’s beneath this room, Phil?”

“I’m sure I don’t know. That door at the end of the library leads to the bedroom that my uncle used,” responded Norris. “I don’t believe

the vault extends this far, so I can't say what lies beneath the library."

"Where did Fordney sleep?"

"Upstairs. There are two stories above this one."

"The logical place to send these high voltage wires is into the earth. Let's go down and investigate. We can do nothing here until we shut off that current." McKelvie was as excited as a schoolboy on a lark.

Norris followed his friend to the vault reluctantly. He had come to hate that dark, cold room with its ghastly associations. The chill atmosphere was crowded with phantom memories that clutched his heart with icy fingers of dread and doubt.

But when McKelvie, after poking around discovered that one wall rang a little hollow and declared that there was another room beyond the vault, the young chemist began to experience a strange apprehension. Was it here, in the bosom of the ancient house that his uncle had buried the secrets destined to destroy his (Norris') happiness? Would he find here the reason for Granya's unaccountable actions? And finding, would he come to hate the girl he loved so vehemently now?

To rid himself of even the shadow of such a

thought, Norris kept his mind focused on McKelvie's movements.

It happened that among the relics in one of the cabinets that lined the vault was a mace-head made of marble and fitted to a handle. It was a formidable weapon used in war by the pre-dynastic Egyptians. McKelvie was not interested in the curio's history nor its antiquity. He saw it only as a means to an end.

Using the mace-head as a pick, he swung it again and again against one portion of the wall. Gradually the cement crumbled away, exposing the bricks. Several of these he was able to loosen by directing the pointed end of the mace against the surrounding mortar. Through the aperture thus produced they were able to get a glimpse into the room beyond.

To Norris' relief, and somewhat to his disappointment since he had made up his mind to encounter all sorts of horrors, McKelvie's flash revealed only a dark, musty hole of a room festooned with cobwebs. There was nothing secret within those four walls.

McKelvie, who had not been hunting for concealed evidences of long forgotten crimes, pointed to the metal box fastened to one of the walls. "There is the mischief-maker," he remarked. "That is the switch that controls the

current leading to the window and bookshelf.”

He enlarged the hole and stepped through, pushing aside the heavy cobwebs with his hands. In another moment he had turned off the electric power.

“You look relieved and disappointed, Phil. Did you expect to find a corpse mouldering in yonder cave?” McKelvie asked lightly. “Or were you endowing your uncle with the perverted imagination of Montresor, the chap who walled up his enemy alive in one of Poe’s masterpieces? The real secret is upstairs.”

They returned to the library and McKelvie again approached “The Philosophy of Epicurus.” He took the precaution to test the volume with the ruler first, then, with a pleased chuckle, he took the book down from the shelf. It came away easily enough, bringing with it a length of insulated wiring that ran down through a hole in the bookshelf. The volume itself, a mere shell to imitate a book, was so wired that contact with the outer surface brought instant and dire results.

“Your uncle was an ingenious old devil,” commented McKelvie. “Let’s see what he was so anxious to guard from meddling hands.”

He pressed the space that Epicurus had concealed and the panel slid aside, disclosing a hole

about six inches square. With shining eyes, McKelvie eagerly plunged in his hand and drew out a long, legal-looking envelope of heavy blue linen.

“Here, Phil.” McKelvie thrust the envelope upon his friend. “You had better open it. After all you are his heir and I have no business prying into what may not have been meant for my eyes.”

Reluctantly Norris examined the envelope. Now that the moment had come he was not so sure that he wanted to know his uncle’s secret. On the upper side of the envelope was written, “To be opened only in case of my death by violence,” showing that Jonas Faraday had prepared for the eventuality that overtook him. Turning the envelope over, Norris saw that the flap had been torn open.

“Look here, Mac. This seems to have been tampered with.”

“Open it, then. Don’t stand there and look at it,” exclaimed McKelvie impatiently. “Let’s have a glance at the enclosure.”

Norris drew out a folded sheet of ordinary paper and spread it out on the table before them. In the very center appeared the words, printed in a bold hand, “Thank you for directing my attention to Jonas Fielding’s hiding-place. By

the time you read this the papers you want will have been destroyed."

The men looked at each other blankly, too astonished to speak. Then McKelvie smote his hands together angrily.

"What a fool I was to leave this room unguarded. I might have known that whoever was in here before us would keep watch upon us. I'm not fit to be a criminal investigator, upon my word, I'm not."

Norris, who had been staring at the paper became uneasily conscious of the fact that he was being spied upon. Guardedly he turned his head and saw a pair of eyes gazing at him from the window. They were light eyes and their expression as they rested on the paper was one of malicious triumph. Even as Norris called his companion's attention to them, they were gone.

"Some one is watching us, Mac," he said nervously.

"Wants to see how we have taken this blow to our plans," returned McKelvie bitterly. "We might as well be going. I'm thoroughly disgusted —— Good Lord, what was that!"

A mocking laugh, high, and sweet, echoed through the dark passage outside the library door, and the next moment Arlita Farrell had walked calmly into the room.

CHAPTER XXIII

THE ARREST

“MISS FARRELL!” McKelvie was the first to recover his voice. He took a step toward the young woman who was watching him with cold, satirical eyes.

“I suppose you are wondering what I am doing here,” remarked Arlita Farrell coolly. “I came to get my rights.” She gestured toward the book-shelf with her head and the motion set the diamond pendants in her ears to sparkling.

McKelvie with aplomb equal to her own, pushed over one of the arm-chairs. “I’m sorry I can’t offer you anything better,” he said. “The cushions seem to have been recently ripped.”

She accepted the chair with a curious smile. “I don’t object. But this is not the only chair in the room,” she hinted.

Norris took the couch but McKelvie fell to pacing the room. “Am I to understand, Miss Farrell, that you abstracted the papers from

this envelope?" he inquired, taking the blue wrapper from the table.

"If you care to put it that way. The contents belonged to me," she replied calmly.

"How can I be sure of that fact? They may also have had a bearing on the crime."

She shrugged. "I know nothing of the crime. I came to get my rights. I was in this room when I heard you come in, so I slipped into the bedroom from which vantage point I discovered where the document was hidden."

"How did you manage to take the volume from its place without suffering a shock?" demanded Norris curiously, his eyes on the cold, impassive face.

"I'm not exactly a fool. I had read, in the account of the crime, how the window was wired, and I knew Jonas well enough to assume that the house would be a death-trap. I came prepared with rubber gloves."

"So you admit knowing Jonas Faraday?" remarked McKelvie caustically.

"Why not? I have enough respect for your ability to know that you would not be long in discovering that I had been his wife, even if I did deny the fact. And, having taken the thing you wanted, I decided that I might as well remain and frankly tell you so. I don't care to be

investigated, you see. I have too much at stake. My career for one thing; my approaching marriage for another."

"May I ask you a rather pertinent question?" inquired Norris.

She glanced at him indifferently. "If you wish. I do not have to answer it, you know," she said in that sweet, husky voice.

"If you were Uncle Jonas' wife, how could you become engaged to Hirshkoff while the former was still living?" demanded the chemist pointedly.

McKelvie nodded approval of the question, but Arlita Farrell only laughed amusedly. "I divorced Jonas five years ago on the grounds of desertion. He left me stranded in England without rhyme or reason and disappeared entirely. I had no idea he was in New York until his murder revealed his whereabouts."

McKelvie paced the room thoughtfully. She was so very self-possessed, this young woman, that it was plain that she had quite the best of the argument.

"Would you mind telling me, for the sake of clearing up one of the many obscure points of this case, just what your relations with Jonas Faraday were?" he asked.

She threw back her ermine coat as though the

weight of it were too much for slender shoulders. Both men noticed the gold brooch with its three tiny hands and, seeing their glance upon it, Arlita Farrell clutched it with her hand.

"Really," she drawled, but her eyes were uneasy, "you ask too much of me."

"Because I know so much," responded McKelvie gravely. "You were the wife of Andrew Howe and you abandoned him for Jonas Faraday ——"

"And you think it was only poetic justice that Jonas Faraday should then have abandoned me?" she queried ironically. "Perhaps it was, but is one to suffer always for the follies of one's youth?"

She added in pleading, dulcet tones, "I was very young, Mr. McKelvie, only seventeen. Andrew was so commonplace, so good, such a model husband. And Jonas. He was fascinating in those days. He appealed to my sense of the romantic. If I ran away with him, it was more his fault than mine."

"And had you no thought for the man who killed himself for love of you?" demanded McKelvie sternly, shutting his mind to the siren quality in her voice.

She shrugged. "Andrew was a fool. It was not necessary for him to play heavy tragedy."

She spoke unfeelingly, once more coldly impassive.

"Did you not feel guilty, taking his money?" continued McKelvie mercilessly.

"No. He owed it to me," she cried out angrily. Then, conscious that she had said too much, she rose. "I didn't come here to subject myself to the third degree," she said icily, buttoning her coat.

McKelvie smiled disarmingly. "I'm an investigator, which is another way of saying that I am a human question mark. You must forgive me by telling me one thing more. Was your father ever acquainted with Jonas Faraday's daughter?"

Her look of surprise was genuine. "I never knew Jonas had a daughter," she responded. "You must be mistaken."

"Perhaps. Does your father paint? That is, was he studying to be an artist in his younger days?"

She laughed. "Now you are growing cold. What an absurd idea. My father has never been interested in art that I know of."

"Can you assure me that those papers had no bearing on the crime?" persisted McKelvie, following her to the door.

"They deal simply with an affair in which

Jonas and I were involved, an affair in which he wronged me cruelly. In the document he names me as his enemy and declares that if he should be murdered I shall be to blame. In fact, to be frank, he accuses me of the crime."

"He must have been deranged," murmured Norris quickly.

"Exactly. But a document of that sort in the hands of the police would bring me undesired notoriety. Therefore I have taken the precaution to suppress the papers."

"I wish I might have had a chance to read them," declared McKelvie. "However, that can't be helped now. By the way, would you mind satisfying my curiosity? Who gave you that brooch you wear?"

She looked him coolly in the face. "It was a gift to me from my husband, Andrew Howe." Then with a bewitching smile, she disappeared down the passage.

"Well, I'm damned," was all McKelvie could find to say.

"And I'm completely lost," declared Norris with a rueful smile. "What's the next move?"

"We seem to have been completely routed. The next move is to leave the scene of our ignominy as gracefully as we can," retorted McKelvie with a grimace.

When Norris had taken the wheel he addressed his moody companion. "Where to, Mac?"

"Stuyvesant Square. Perhaps there will be a message for me concerning Farrell. After that we'll call on Miss Howe and settle the question of Andrew Howe once and for all. I'm tired of having his name crop up wherever we turn."

When they reached Stuyvesant Square, Dinah, who had evidently been on the lookout for her master, admitted them, her face lugubriously lengthened.

"Dey's a gemman waitin' to see yo', Massah Graydon. He am walkin' up and down now fo' most a half hour, wearin' out de rug in de study, yessah," she declared indignantly.

McKelvie smiled. "Not as bad as that, I hope. What does he want?"

"I dunno, sah. He done say he mus' see yo'. He wouldn't give no name nor no business, Mas-sah Graydon."

"Can it be Williams?" suggested Norris.

"I hope not," returned his companion shortly.

With an air of detachment, as though he had no concern in the matter, Norris watched the meeting between McKelvie and the stranger, who turned out, upon introduction, to be Eldredge Howe's lawyer. He was elderly and very dignified, this legal adviser, smooth-shaven,

wearing gold *pince-nez*, and he was excessively annoyed at having been kept waiting so long. He did not like delays.

McKelvie, who was for his part not greatly pleased at this interruption to his immediate plans, shrugged. "My dear sir, if I had known you were going to honor me with a call ——"

The lawyer went on speaking as though he had not heard. "This is all very unexpected — and somewhat arbitrary and unjust, too, if I may say so."

"I think I could follow you more intelligently, Mr. Dane, if I had a slight glimmering of the subject under discussion," remarked McKelvie, unruffled, from his position on the hearth.

The lawyer blinked as though some one had struck him, and his glasses flew off. He picked them up in a bewildered way, polished them vigorously, and replaced them on his sharp nose. "Do you mean to say," he demanded, peering more closely at McKelvie, "that you are not aware of the reason for my visit?"

"Such an admission will blast my reputation, but I must confess to being totally in the dark," retorted McKelvie, half-comically, half-seriously. "However, knowing Williams, I might hazard a guess."

The attorney was too taken up with the im-

portance of his mission to condescend to frivolity. "Am I mistaken in assuming that you ordered the arrest of my client this afternoon?"

"Good heavens!" ejaculated Norris, startled out of his detachment.

"I'm not connected with headquarters, Mr. Dane," answered McKelvie coldly.

"No — I know you are not; but you called upon Mr. Howe — and well, he was positive that you told the police that he was the man they were looking for," explained the lawyer haltingly.

"Basing my accusation upon what?"

"Upon the clue of the dagger."

"Thank you for your very flattering opinion of my ability as an investigator." McKelvie's cynicism was the result of McKelvie's pride. He reared a barrier of sarcasm against the shafts directed toward the one thing he really cared about, his reputation as a solver of mysterious crimes. "I'm not quite such a fool as I may look. I do not counsel arrests on such slight evidence, Mr. Dane."

The lawyer remarked with dignified pomposity, "Of course, you must understand that all this is very upsetting, Mr. McKelvie. It is not very pleasant for an innocent man to be clapped into jail——"

McKelvie waved aside the platitudes. "I'm not responsible for the stupidity of the police. If you will have patience I think I can persuade the Chief that the arrest was a mistake."

When the lawyer had gone, McKelvie took up the cable that was waiting for him. It was from London, an answer to his message.

"What news?" inquired Norris when McKelvie had deciphered the cable.

"More or less what I expected." McKelvie read rapidly, "John Thurston Farrell arrested twenty-four years ago for selling bogus stock, incorporated under name of Silver Creek Mine Company. Sentenced and served eighteen years at Dartmoor. No such persons involved as Howe or Faraday."

"What does that last sentence mean?"

"I took the precaution to inquire whether your uncle or Eldredge Howe might not have been involved with Farrell. Just an idea of mine which as you see amounted to nothing." McKelvie went on as if to himself, "I can see now that Farrell could not have been Trevor, the artist. Farrell was at Dartmoor when Trevor painted Granya Faraday's picture."

He rose and flung aside the cable. "Our best plan now is to go to headquarters and see Williams before we drive to Morningside Heights."

Norris agreed half-heartedly. He would rather have gone direct to Granya's house since there was a chance that he might induce Miss Howe to intercede for him with the girl.

At Center Street the two men entered the portals of the grim building that frowned majestically upon the narrow street. McKelvie inquired for Williams and they were admitted to an inner office where the detective received them with Olympian graciousness.

"What can I do for you?" he asked, beaming upon McKelvie with the consciousness of a man who has fulfilled his duty and knows it to his own satisfaction.

"You can release Mr. Eldredge Howe," replied McKelvie quietly. "What gave you the ridiculous notion that he was guilty?"

Williams swelled visibly. "What gave me the notion? A little investigation on my own. I took the dagger over to the Museum and it was recognized as belonging to the collection that the Egyptologist had loaned last month for exhibition purposes. After I heard Fordney's story, I just put two and two together and made——"

"A mess of things," muttered McKelvie in Norris' ear. Aloud he remarked, "Is the Chief in, Williams?"

Williams looked at his rival sharply. "Why do you want to see the Chief?"

"Because," said McKelvie deliberately, "I think you have made a mistake in arresting a man of such prominence with such slight justification."

"I was amply justified," retorted Williams, dilating like a ruffled gamecock. "Howe is the only one who had any motive for killing Jonas Faraday."

"In order to have committed the crime, Mr. Howe would have had to have been away from home from about two the night before until seven the night of the murder. As it happens he was home during that interval," returned McKelvie calmly. "Send word to the Chief that I want to see him, please."

Grudgingly Williams complied, saying to Norris in a disgruntled tone, "He makes me tired, always butting in."

Norris did not reply. He was so absorbed in his own meditations that he was scarcely aware of the fact that McKelvie and Williams had left the room. He was still deep in thought when McKelvie returned alone.

"The Chief is going to release Eldredge Howe. Let's hasten our departure. I want to hear what Miss Marietta has to say before her

brother reaches home. I think she will talk more freely in his absence," remarked McKelvie, laying a hand on his friend's shoulder.

Norris looked up anxiously. "Mac, do the police know about — about Granya's having taken the dagger?"

"No. Until we are absolutely positive of the extent of her complicity, there is no use in mentioning her existence to the police," was the reassuring answer.

Norris sighed. He hated to contemplate that thought of the girl's possible complicity.

CHAPTER XXIV

GRANYA'S PARENTAGE

WHEN Norris and McKelvie reached Morningside Heights, Miss Marietta Howe received them in a state of extreme agitation. They were in the Louis XIV drawing-room and she sat on the edge of a gold chair, twisting her wrinkled hands in nervous apprehension. She was very much upset over her brother's arrest. She was still more disturbed when Norris asked for Granya.

"She — she is not at home, Mr. Norris," whispered the old lady.

"Where is she?" demanded Norris, menacingly, recalling another time when the girl had been away from home.

Miss Howe gazed at him terrified. She wrung her hands. "She — she is with friends," she gasped out as though the words were torn from her.

McKelvie motioned Norris aside. "Miss Howe," he said gently, "you need not be afraid to speak the truth. You see we know that Granya was Jonas Faraday's granddaughter."

Her startled eyes flew to McKelvie's lean face. "How did you learn that?" she asked affrighted.

McKelvie drew up a chair and explained. For a space after his melodious voice had ceased, Miss Howe sat with bent head, her eyes on the carpet as though studying the design.

Presently she murmured, "You ought to know, Mr. Norris, since you want to marry her. Perhaps I can serve her best by telling you the truth because you love her — and love is stronger than hate."

She raised her pale eyes to the chemist and at the sadness in their faded depths, he took her withered hand in his and patted it.

"Please believe," he said earnestly, "that nothing you can tell me will make any difference. I shall love her whatever she may have done and whoever she may turn out to be."

Miss Howe spoke sadly. "She is not to blame. The Bible speaks truth. 'The sins of the fathers shall be visited on the children unto the third generation of them that hate me.' It was all my brother's fault. He and Jonas Faraday are to blame for all the trouble that has overtaken us."

She fell silent and her narrow shoulders twitched spasmodically. McKelvie said, "You are speaking of Eldredge Howe?"

She shook her head vehemently. "No, no. I mean my other brother, Daniel. But I had better begin at the beginning, otherwise you will not understand. There were three of us in my family, Eldredge, Daniel, and myself. Eldredge was the eldest, and Daniel the youngest of the three. Daniel was headstrong, impulsive. At twenty-one he married a Spanish girl whom he met in Cuba. Five years later he deserted her and joined Jonas Faraday in some shady enterprise."

Norris remarked bitterly, "I shouldn't be surprised."

"The Spanish wife, Juanita, came home to me with her little son whom she had christened Julio. She did not live long, poor little thing; and, realizing that Daniel cared nothing for his son, we, Eldredge and I, adopted the child, giving him the name of Andrew."

"Ah," murmured McKelvie, "I begin to see where the pieces of the puzzle belong."

Miss Howe resumed, "Twenty-four years ago, Daniel and Jonas Faraday were in London, where they got into some trouble with the authorities. We were living in New York, then, and Daniel came home for the first time in about fourteen years. He told us that he was a fugitive from justice and begged us to hide him.

Eldredge — he is an unforgiving man, Mr. Norris — wanted to give Daniel up, but Andrew, who was then eighteen, interceded for his father, so Daniel stayed with us. But not for long. Something was troubling him — remorse I know now — and he sent for Jonas Faraday without consulting us.”

“ Did Jonas Faraday come to New York?” asked McKelvie during the pause that followed.

“ Yes, he came.” The gray voice continued, “ Eldredge, blaming Mr. Faraday for Daniel’s perversion, stormed out of the house, leaving Daniel and Jonas Faraday alone in the library.”

“ About how old was your brother at this time?” put in McKelvie.

“ Let me see. Andrew was eighteen — and Daniel was twenty-one when he married. Um — yes — Daniel was forty at this time, quite old enough to know what he was doing, I thought.”

“ You were telling us about the interview between your brother and Jonas Faraday,” McKelvie reminded her as she fell silent, brooding on the past.

“ Yes, yes. They talked a long time, then Mr. Faraday came out into the hall and called me. He said that Daniel was dying. I could hardly believe my ears. I rushed into the library

and there was Daniel lying on the sofa before the fireplace. One glance at his face and I knew he couldn't live. The police were after him and he had taken poison to avoid the disgrace of being arrested."

She shook her head mournfully. "I asked Mr. Faraday what Daniel had done, and he took from his pocket some sheets of closely written paper and held them out to me.

" 'You will find an account of the whole affair written on these pages,' he said. I put out my hand to take them but, with an unexpected twist, he flung the papers into the fire. The action roused Daniel from his stupor. He tried to speak. He pointed toward Jonas Faraday and I caught the word 'restitution.' At that Mr. Faraday laughed and remarked sneeringly, 'Restitution? Bah. I always knew you were a coward.' "

"What had your brother done to deserve arrest?" asked Norris sympathetically.

"We never found out. When Eldredge came home and learned of the tragedy, he was beside himself. He raged against Jonas Faraday. He forbade Andrew and myself to have anything further to do with the man, declaring that he would cast us out of his home if we disobeyed him. We were disgraced enough without dig-

ging up any more skeletons around Daniel's memory, Eldredge said. Let Jonas Faraday make restitution. You see, we learned afterwards that the police were not on Daniel's trail. Mr. Faraday had misinformed Daniel for purposes of his own. Fear and remorse drove Daniel to commit suicide."

Norris muttered something derogatory about his uncle, and Miss Howe smiled sadly.

"That is all past and gone," she said gently. "And if he was your uncle, remember that he was also Granya's grandfather."

"Yes?"

"We had brought up Andrew to be a good American, even though he was the image of his mother and had the latter's passionate temperament. When Andrew was twenty we moved to Paris for a few years so that Eldredge might pursue certain investigations connected with Egyptology. He had trained Andrew to act as his secretary, so of course the boy sailed with us. On the way over Andrew became acquainted with a Mr. Trevor, a young artist of considerable ability. We had been in Paris about a year when this artist invited us to an exhibition of his paintings. Among them was the portrait of a very beautiful young girl."

Miss Howe's sigh echoed softly through the

room. "Barring Granya, this girl was the most radiant creature I have ever seen. She was alive, dominant, sparkling with vitality and the artist had painted her with startling vividness. I can only convey to you the impression that portrait made on me by saying that she might have been Granya herself about to step down from a frame of gold."

Norris said soberly, "I know." Hadn't the portrait affected him in the same way? He had fallen in love with Granya because he had first been ensnared by the beauty of the pictured face.

McKelvie was not thinking solely of the painting. He was marvelling at the precision with which Fate marched onward to its appointed end. Each step led ominously to the next as though the persons concerned in that tragic past were puppets in the hands of a destiny which they had no power to circumvent.

Miss Howe pursued her narrative. "Andrew fell in love with the portrait and insisted on buying it. Being half Spanish, he was impetuous, violent. The artist refused to sell. The portrait belonged to the young girl, Granya Faraday. That she was the daughter of Jonas Faraday did not in the least deter Andrew. He discovered where she was staying — a private school in Paris — and he found a means to see

her. The upshot was that they married — secretly.”

“Montague and Capulet,” murmured McKelvie.

“Yes. Her father hated the Howes as much as Eldredge hated Jonas Faraday. But one cannot hate forever. Andrew confided in me and I determined to help him. I got hold of a doctor and sent him to see Andrew’s wife. For a certain sum, he consented to represent to Mr. Faraday that his daughter was in urgent need of country air. Mr. Faraday was in England but he came to Paris and removed the girl to a home in the suburbs. Then he went back to London again.”

“Andrew saw his wife there, then?”

“Yes. We bribed the housekeeper and the nurse, both of whom were engaged by the doctor. It was there that Granya was born. Her mother died two days later. I removed the baby before they sent for Jonas Faraday. Poor Andrew was disconsolate. He had left the portrait which his wife had given him at the house and Jonas Faraday took it away with him. Andrew did not dare to claim it, so he was left without even the comfort of having her painting to look at.”

“What did you do with the baby? Did you

tell your brother who she was?" asked Norris eagerly.

"No, we did not dare. If Eldredge had known that Granya was a Faraday, he would have repudiated her and insisted on sending her to an orphanage. My brother does not forgive, Mr. Norris. So Andrew and I concocted a story between us, changing the mother's name and explaining that the marriage had been kept secret because she was still in school and her parents would have objected. We had a time convincing him. He wanted to turn the baby over to the bereaved parents of Andrew's wife, but we finally pacified him and he became as fond of the child as though it had been his own."

"How did you convince him?" demanded McKelvie, who wanted all details made clear.

"We had a dreadful time. We got the housekeeper who had been with Granya's mother, to pose as Andrew's mother-in-law. She declared herself willing, for a small sum, to give up all claims to the baby." Miss Howe raised her faded eyes to his face. "It was the only thing we could do. It was far better to impose on Eldredge than to turn Andrew's child over to Jonas Faraday."

"I should hope so," ejaculated Norris fervently. "You were quite justified."

"I don't know," she replied, slowly. "I sometimes wonder. For there was more trouble to come. Ten years later Andrew met Arlita Farrell. We were in London then. She was seventeen, but a woman of the world. I did not like her, but she swept Andrew off his feet. She was cold and hard, except when she smiled."

Both Norris and McKelvie, having seen the smile, understood perfectly.

"She insisted on living in Paris. Andrew took her there on their honeymoon. And then she met Jonas Fielding. He was rich and pampered her. She was a selfish girl and cared nothing for Andrew, so she eloped with the older man. She broke Andrew's heart and he went mad with jealousy and the disgrace. He wrote me a wild letter, swearing that he would kill them both. I went to Paris at once, but I was too late. I found Andrew lying dead on the floor. Suicide they called it. But I know better. He had spoken of a duel, and Jonas Fielding had been there, I'm sure. I cannot bear to repeat it, even now." Her voice broke on the words and she hid her face in her trembling old hands.

In the distant shadows phantom voices whispered of that tragic end and Norris thought he could hear the crack of the pistol and see his uncle creeping from the house. But it was only

the crackling of a log in the fireplace that had awakened an echo of Fordney's story in his brain.

"Miss Howe," McKelvie broke the heavy silence, "did you know that Jonas Faraday had changed his name to Fielding?"

The old lady roused herself. "I did not know it then. If Andrew divined the truth, he did not tell me. Do you wonder that Eldredge was so bitter against the man? Through him both Daniel and Andrew were driven to take their own lives."

"Why did Andrew leave Arlita Farrell his property? After the way she treated him, one would have naturally supposed that he would have left his money to his daughter," questioned McKelvie.

"Because she was clever," responded Miss Howe bitterly. "She got him to make a will naming her his sole heir, promising to look after Granya's interests herself. The hypocrite! She had no such intentions. Andrew died so unexpectedly. There was no time to change the will and Eldredge was too proud to contest it. So Arlita Farrell got the money."

"He owed it to me." What had Arlita Farrell meant by those words, McKelvie wondered. Did the tragedy that had involved Andrew Howe

spring from a deeper, darker source than a mere broken romance?

"Miss Howe, what is the significance of the brooch that Arlita Farrell wears?" he asked.

"Brooch?" repeated Miss Howe, puzzled. "I am not familiar with her jewels."

"This one is made in the shape of three hands clasped together with the motto '*Bona Fides*' engraved around the edge ——"

"You are speaking of Granya's ring, aren't you?" interrupted Miss Howe.

"The brooch and the ring are identical."

"I know nothing of the brooch. The ring was originally a scarf pin of Daniel's. Andrew had it made into a ring for himself. It was the only thing of his father's that he owned. When Andrew married Granya Faraday, he used that ring. She gave it back to him when she was dying. Granya came across it one day and when she learned that it had been her mother's wedding ring, she insisted on wearing it."

"You are sure that Andrew did not have two scarf pins or even three?"

"I'm quite sure. I never saw any other that I know of."

"What was the motto supposed to represent?"

"I have no idea, none at all."

“What about Granya?” broke in Norris impatiently. “It is her part in this recent murder that I am interested in. The rest matters nothing.”

Miss Howe replied in a dignified tone, “Granya had nothing to do with the murder, Mr. Norris. I doubt if she has ever heard of Mr. Faraday. She has never been told the truth about her parentage.”

“But, she had the dagger — and she was near the scene of the crime,” exclaimed the chemist. “I know she’s not guilty — but what has she to do with the affair?”

Miss Howe lowered her voice mysteriously. “There is a strange influence at work. Granya had gone out the night before the crime about eight o’clock. She is very independent. She had received a letter asking her to call at a certain house on Fourth Avenue if she wanted to learn something of importance to her future happiness. She went out without saying a word to me about the matter. And then she didn’t come back.

“What a night and day I put in!” Miss Howe shook her head agitatedly at the recollection. “I had to tell Eldredge that the child was ill to keep the knowledge of her absence from him. I was frantic. Then about six o’clock that evening she phoned me she was

all right and would be home as soon as possible."

"That was the evening I saw her in the telephone booth," commented Norris.

"Yes. When she came in, I saw that she had been very much frightened. She was as white as a sheet and there were black and blue marks on her arms," went on Miss Howe with rising indignation. "But she wouldn't tell me a thing except to say that she was all right."

"And she is away again now?" demanded Norris excitedly.

"No. She is home, but she told me to say she was out because — well, to be frank, she was too deeply hurt last night to want to see you again so soon, Mr. Norris," replied Miss Howe.

Norris turned away to hide the look of anguish in his eyes. McKelvie said coolly, "Tell her to come down here, Miss Howe. Explain to her that it is imperative that she answer some questions. If she does not want to see Phil, I'll talk to her in another room."

Miss Howe put her hand kindly on Norris' arm. "I think she really wants to see you. Won't you send her a message?"

Eagerly Norris complied, hastily scribbling an appeal on one of his cards.

In answer to Miss Howe's summons the

wooden-faced footman appeared in the doorway.

"Take this card to Miss Granya and tell her that I want to see her in the library," she ordered.

"Miss Granya is not home," responded the footman.

"Not home?" exclaimed Miss Howe. "Impossible!"

"When did she go out?" inquired McKelvie practically.

"About half an hour ago, sir. She took the car."

With a flurried gesture Miss Howe dismissed the servant and turned to Norris. "I am afraid for her. I know she is in danger. I feel it." She wrung her hands helplessly and rocked her thin old body back and forth in an agony of apprehension.

Norris grabbed his hat and made for the door. On the threshold he paused and turned back wearily. He did not know where Granya had gone, how could he possibly find her? What a fool he had been to question her the night before. If anything happened to her, he would never forgive himself. His bitter self-condemnation was cut short by the soothing tones of McKelvie's calm voice.

"Miss Howe," the latter was saying, "you

must have some reason for speaking so apprehensively. Do you know or suspect that she may have gone back to hunt for a clue to the—”

“She might have. She said she would clear herself of suspicion before she would consent to marry Mr. Norris. That is just what I’m afraid of; that she went back to Fourth Avenue and that she has been trapped again.” Miss Howe addressed Norris. Her eyes were pleading, earnest. “You love her. Go — go and find her. She is in danger. Remember that she, too, is a Faraday.”

CHAPTER XXV

THE SEARCH

ONCE in his car, Norris drove most recklessly toward Gramercy Park. The words "She is a Faraday," sent a cold chill down his spine. Was Granya to pay the penalty for his uncle's crimes?

He said gloomily to McKelvie, "I blame myself ——"

"Nonsense. Granya can take care of herself and we have no actual knowledge that she is in any danger. It would take her almost half an hour just to drive downtown from her home."

"Why should she go just before dinner and without saying a word to her aunt?" objected Norris.

"That looks suspicious, of course. Miss Howe has lived so long in terror of her brother's learning the truth about Granya that she naturally becomes panicky the moment anything happens that concerns the girl."

"She is a Faraday and the person who killed my uncle has a grudge against the Faradays. I wonder though," Norris mused, "how this person knew that my uncle was also Granya's grandfather?"

“Miss Farrell might have known,” McKelvie pointed out. “Andrew Howe probably confided to her the story of his previous marriage. She was talking to Granya the night we spoke to her in her dressing-room at the theater.”

“If my uncle deserted Miss Farrell, she would have a grudge against him,” declared Norris. “What’s that old adage, ‘Hell hath no fury like a woman scorned’?”

McKelvie looked dubious. “I don’t know. She didn’t appear to me to have been greatly grieved. I would be more inclined to say that she had rid herself of your uncle than that he had deserted her.”

“Which brings us right back where we started,” said Norris impatiently.

“On the contrary. We know that Granya was at the Fourth Avenue house and that therefore she must know the criminal. The question is, why does she shield this guilty person?”

“If he were some one very dear to her?” suggested Norris. “But, no, that’s nonsense. She does not know the criminal. You said yourself that Eldredge Howe was innocent.”

“I simply said I did not counsel arrests on insufficient evidence,” retorted the other. “Granya is shielding the criminal, as you will learn when we find her.”

Norris made no answer. He stopped his car before the frame house on Fourth Avenue. As they had done the day before, they opened the window and entered through the basement. But a thorough search revealed no trace of recent occupancy. No one had been in the house since the night of the crime.

From there to Gramercy Park was just a step. Again the two men traversed the gloomy old house, but nothing had been touched apparently since they had spoken to Arlita Farrell in the dismantled library. McKelvie, overlooking no possible recess, examined the house from attic to cellar, both the used and unused portions coming under his keen scrutiny. There was no trace suggesting that Granya Howe had visited the house.

"I think that we are just wasting time. The best thing we can do, Phil, is to go over to my house to dinner. By that time Granya will be home and we can go back to Morningside Heights to talk to her," was the way McKelvie summed up the situation.

Norris agreed reluctantly, because he had no valid objection to offer. After all Granya's capture was purely a matter of conjecture and they might very well be embarked on a wild goose chase.

After dinner Norris was anxious to drive back uptown but McKelvie vetoed the suggestion.

“I know how you feel, Phil. You hate to remain idle. If you are dashing here and yon, even though it is wasted energy, you have the notion that you are accomplishing something. The sensible thing is to phone Miss Howe. If Granya is still missing——” He finished the sentence by taking up the telephone and giving a number.

McKelvie’s monosyllabic comments were not illuminating. Norris clenched his hands nervously. “Well?” he exclaimed as the other put down the receiver.

McKelvie’s face was grave. “She is still missing. Hold on, Phil. There is no use in dashing out half cocked.”

Norris came back into the room and walked back and forth rapidly. “Good heavens, Mac, let’s act first and talk afterwards.”

“Where do you intend to look for her?” asked McKelvie calmly.

Norris threw out his hands in despair. “I don’t know. Have it your own way. Only for mercy’s sake, let’s do something and do it quickly.”

McKelvie picked up the phone again. “There are two places where she might be. She may

have gone to talk things over with Peter Van Dusen; she might be with Arlita Farrell in Gramercy Park. We'll try the Van Dusens' first."

But Peter Van Dusen had heard nothing of Granya since the night of the supper. And the maid who answered the phone at Gramercy Park explained that her mistress had gone to the theater.

"Is Mr. Farrell home?" inquired McKelvie.

"No, sir. He left a few minutes ago," came the reply.

McKelvie put down the phone and walked to the window where he stood looking out over the dark and desolate square. Several times he frowned and tapped his fingers impatiently on the windowpane as though he were trying to make up his mind what were best to be done. Norris watched him uneasily.

Finally he turned from the window with a satisfied nod. "All right, Phil. Drive me to the theater. Arlita Farrell knows where Granya is."

"You have a reason for that statement?" queried Norris eagerly.

"I always have a reason for everything I do," was all the satisfaction he got. McKelvie refused to commit himself further.

Norris, impatient of delays, drove a round-

about route to the theater to avoid the congested traffic along Broadway. As before, McKelvie obtained entrance across the rear of the stage and knocked at the door of the star's dressing-room. As before the maid, after a momentary hesitation, admitted them to Arlita Farrell's presence.

The star glanced at them coldly, "What is it now? Am I to be persecuted this way at all hours?"

"Granya Howe is missing," burst out Norris, before McKelvie could reply.

"What is that to me?" responded Arlita Farrell curtly. "I told you before that I do not know her."

"There is a difference between knowing her and knowing who she is," McKelvie pointed out sternly. "Miss Farrell, if anything should happen to Granya Howe, I shall hold you responsible."

The cold, hard eyes that had stared at them so contemptuously wavered beneath McKelvie's steady glance. "I — what do you mean?" faltered the star, losing her composure.

McKelvie leaned forward and spoke rapidly in an undertone. Norris could not catch the words, but he saw Arlita Farrell's eyes grow wide with sudden fear.

"No, no," she whispered, "not that. You do not understand."

"I have my duty to others to perform," replied McKelvie coldly.

She clasped her beringed white hands together and looked at McKelvie pleadingly, meltingly; but the latter was obdurate. Finally, with a sigh, she called her maid and gave her some low-toned instruction. The maid left the small, luxurious room and Arlita Farrell spoke again to McKelvie.

"I am sure you are wrong."

"That remains to be proved," answered McKelvie dispassionately.

"Even if you are in the right there are extenuating circumstances ——"

The advent of the maid put an end to the controversy. Arlita Farrell turned eagerly to the girl. "Is he coming?"

"He is not in the theater, Miss Farrell," replied the maid.

"Not in the theater!" The star glanced at McKelvie and repeated dully, "Not in the theater. This is the first time he has missed seeing the curtain rise since the show was opened."

"I think, Miss Farrell," said McKelvie significantly, "that you had better come with me."

She glanced wildly around, threw her ermine cape over her costume, and hurried out into the wings. "I'll have to see the manager," she called back to them.

"What's it all about?" murmured Norris, bewilderedly.

If McKelvie intended to reply, he had no chance. Arlita Farrell was back again, urging them to hurry as she led them out the side entrance of the theater.

"Gramercy Park East," she said to Norris as McKelvie helped her into the tonneau of the car. "I know that something must have happened. Hurry, hurry before it is too late."

Only dimly comprehending what was going on, Norris obeyed literally, ignoring the traffic regulations as calmly as though they had no existence for him. When he reached Gramercy Park he drew up before a row of brownstone dwellings, almost directly opposite the row in which Jonas Fielding had exiled himself for five years.

Arlita Farrell alighted and ran into the house alone. "We'll wait for her here," said McKelvie. "She has gone in to make inquiries."

"What about Granya?" demanded Norris impatiently.

"Here she comes. Well, Miss Farrell? Was I right?"

Arlita Farrell did not stop to discuss the question. With a frantic, "For God's sake, come," she skirted the desolate park and made for the house where the crime had been committed. Instantly McKelvie and Norris had jumped from the machine and hastily followed her in the darkness.

Though the outer doors were closed, it was easy enough to obtain access since the broken locks had not yet been replaced. Hurriedly they traversed the dark hall and crossed the short passage leading to the wall. Then of one accord they broke into a run. From the direction of the vault came strange muffled sounds, strangled sobs mingled with the tap, tap, tap of stone on stone.

Norris was the first to reach the end of the corridor. He wrenched open the heavy vault door—it had been only partly closed—and almost tumbled headlong down the steps, so great was his amazement.

In the poor light from the one inadequate burner a startling scene stamped itself upon his brain. Granya, bound and gagged, was lying on the floor, sobbing. Beside her stood a tall, gaunt figure, swinging the Egyptian mace-head against that portion of the wall that McKelvie had slightly demolished when he was hunting

for the switch that controlled the wiring system in the library.

Even as he noted these things, Norris started down the steps, whereupon the figure swung around and he recognized Arlita Farrell's father. Lifting the mace-head high above his head, Farrell called loudly, glaring at them with burning, relentless eyes, "If any of you make a move, I'll kill her as sure as my name is John Thurston Farrell."

Norris paused abruptly, afraid to move lest he endanger Granya's life. McKelvie remarked contemptuously from the head of the steps, "Just move aside, Mr. Farrell. I've got you covered."

"Shoot, then," answered the man passionately. "Shoot but I'll take her with me just the same."

"For God's sake, Mac," exclaimed Norris wildly.

Arlita Farrell who had been standing immobile like a person in a trance spoke up hurriedly, a sharp word or two in French. The rest happened almost too quickly for thought.

As though the words in that sweet, husky voice had acted as a goad, Farrell swung the club downwards. Before it reached its mark, two shots in rapid succession rang through the

vault and Farrell dropped to his knees with a cry of rage.

As Norris gathered the terrified girl in his arms, he heard Arlita Farrell exclaim, "You have killed him!" and McKelvie answer nonchalantly, "You will find that I have not even wounded him."

CHAPTER XXVI

THE MOTIVE

WHEN Granya had been released, she flung herself, sobbing hysterically, into Norris' arms. "Take me away, Phil," she cried, shuddering. "He — he was going to lock me up in here. Please take me away."

Arlita Farrell, who had been kneeling beside her father, spoke gently, with the first trace of womanly feeling in her voice, "Take her to my house, Mr. Norris. If Mr. McKelvie will help me with Father, I think we will all do well to leave this ghastly place."

Norris led the girl away thankfully and McKelvie followed, leading Farrell who went with him quietly enough though he walked like a man in a daze. He had not been hurt in any way, for McKelvie's shots had only shattered the mace. It was the shock of the concussion that had momentarily stunned the actress' father.

When Granya had been comforted and Miss Howe had been apprised of the girl's safety, Arlita Farrell asked Norris and McKelvie to talk to her father.

“He wants to tell you himself his reasons for what he has done,” she said. “You must not judge him too harshly. You do not know his provocation.”

“I do know, Miss Farrell,” responded McKelvie gently. “I shall not judge him. He has been punished enough.”

She thanked him with her eyes and led the way into the luxurious library where her father was sitting disconsolately, his head buried in his hands. Since Granya refused to be separated from Norris, he acceded to her wish that she be allowed to hear the story of that tragic past.

“You shall hear.” Farrell raised his head with a vehement gesture when his daughter roused him from his reverie. “You shall hear how I was tricked and cheated of everything that made life worth living; you shall hear how my wife and daughter were forced to work their fingers to the bone to keep body and soul alive while they — the vultures who preyed upon us — waxed fat upon the best the land could offer.”

The words reverberated through the room and Norris drew Granya closer within the shelter of his arms.

“Twenty-four years ago,” said Farrell more quietly, “I was a happy, contented man, living in a small house in the suburbs of London with

my wife and little daughter. I had a good position in an old established firm and was quite satisfied to remain with them always. Then one cursed day I met Jonas Faraday. He had a persuasive manner about him and we became friends. He was about seven years older than I and I foolishly made an idol of him. To prove my regard I bestowed upon him my watch because he had admired it and because our initials happened to be the same."

He dragged the watch from his pocket and opened the back, pointing to the chaste J. T. F. on the inside of the case. Both McKelvie and Norris noticed the lock of auburn hair was gone.

"Jonas had a partner, Daniel Howe, and the two of them came to me with a proposition. They had bought a mine at Silver Creek. It promised to yield big profits, but to work it more money was necessary. They had decided to form a company and sell stock. For a certain sum — a small amount — they would let me in on the ground floor as it were. They also wanted me to manage the office in London while they were away at Silver Creek. I had some money saved and I joined them in their enterprise, so completely had I fallen beneath the spell of Jonas' personality. To inaugurate the new company he gave a dinner to Howe and myself and

presented us each with a scarf pin bearing the motto, '*Bona Fides*,' Good Faith — what a mockery."

He laughed harshly and then continued stonily, "I became manager of the Silver Creek Mine Company and sent out salesmen to dispose of the stock. Two months later I was arrested on the charge of defrauding the public. I wired Jonas through my wife and he wired back to say nothing until I had seen the lawyer he had engaged for me, as my arrest was a gross miscarriage of justice. The stock was good."

"Ah," murmured McKelvie, "Faraday was clever to employ the lawyer."

Farrell went on unheeding, "I believed implicitly in Jonas' good faith. I waited for the lawyer. He came the next day, that barrister, a man with a great reputation for winning his cases. I said to myself, 'Jonas thinks the best counsel is none too good for me' and I confided the whole story to the lawyer. Somehow — he could make black seem white, that man — he convinced me that my best course was to plead guilty of the charge of selling the stock and let him handle the case. The stock was not bogus. The mine had not yet begun to yield but there was plenty of ore and there was no reason to suppose that in time big profits would not accrue.

I was ignorant of legal jugglery. I thought he knew best, so I did as I was told. I might just as well have employed the devil as my attorney. I'd have been in better hands," he added bitterly.

"The barrister was bribed, of course?"

"He was Jonas' henchman and he had an interest in the company, I learned later. I know nothing of legal phraseology, so I cannot explain how he managed it, but I was brought into court — there was no jury since I had pleaded guilty — and sentenced to twenty years in Dartmoor prison. They needed a scapegoat and they traded on my ignorance and trust. Eighteen years I was confined before they let me out."

"And we, my mother and I," broke in Arlita Farrell in a hard voice, "were left practically penniless. We appealed to Daniel Howe to help us and he only laughed and told us to shift for ourselves. I was too young to know then, but later I learned of the menial tasks my mother was forced to perform to keep a miserable roof over our heads. If I was hard and worldly-wise at seventeen, Daniel Howe was to blame — Howe and his partner, Jonas Faraday."

Farrell, whose thoughts were on the past, took up his narrative as though he had not heard. "Eighteen years is a long time to be alone,

brooding on one's wrongs. I lived for the day when I should be released and the men who had tricked me should pay me back in full for those wasted years."

"Couldn't you obtain a reversal of your sentence?" asked Norris. "Couldn't you prove you had been tricked?"

Farrell laughed mirthlessly. "You don't know them. Prove anything? My wife consulted another lawyer. The papers were in my name. There was nothing to connect them with the enterprise except her word and mine. Prove anything!" and he laughed again.

"When I left Dartmoor," he resumed, "Daniel was dead, the lawyer was dead and Jonas had disappeared. The thought that I had lost my chance of revenge almost drove me mad. I knew that my wife had died in penury and that my daughter was married and living in Paris. She had written to me to come to France as soon as I was released and she had sent me money for my passage. I went to Paris. Imagine my horror to discover that Arlita had married the man who had wronged me. I knew him in spite of the years."

"I did not know that he was Faraday," explained the actress hastily. "He called himself Fielding and I had never met him when my

father first knew him. I was only three years old at the time."

"But you knew that Andrew Howe was Daniel's son?" inquired McKelvie.

"Yes. That is why I married him; that is why I broke his heart and disgraced his name. I wanted to avenge my mother for all she had suffered at his father's hands. Fielding was simply a means to an end," she defended herself proudly.

"When I told Arlita who Fielding was, she was quite ready to aid me. She inveigled him to London where she made him settle some money on her. Then I sent him a cable and he fled, without her. I joined her in London where she turned the money over to me and I pursued Jonas around the world, until, worn and haggard, he hid himself in the house across the park. I rented this house to keep watch upon him. I used to laugh to think that he was imprisoned in that house like a rat in a hole. He did not dare venture forth for fear of me. I did not want to kill him, although I let him think so. No. I wanted him to suffer as I had suffered. He had put me behind bars. Very well. He should have a taste of that himself."

Farrell's voice rang passionately through the silent room and he glared about him with eyes

that seemed to burn with hatred in his dead-white face.

"Did he know that you were near by?" asked Norris. He had been listening avidly to this story of broken faith and inexcusable treachery, at first with pity for the gaunt man who had suffered so unjustly, but gradually with the pity changing to abhorrence for this lust for vengeance so exultingly displayed.

"Yes, he knew," responded Farrell gloatingly. "That is why he barricaded himself so securely."

"Why didn't he appeal to the law to protect him?"

"He was afraid. He knew that long before the law could step in he would be dead. Besides, there were many charges against him. The law would have been glad to know of Jonas Faraday's existence."

"Wouldn't it have been simpler, then, to have given him over to justice?" queried McKelvie.

"Simpler, yes. But then he would have been at peace. This way he lived in torment. He could not know when my cunning would pierce his defenses and I would take his life. I kept him in hell where he rightfully belonged."

"I was with him before his murder. Why didn't he tell me it was you whom he feared?" asked Norris suddenly.

“ Because I had let him understand that the day he mentioned my name to a single soul, that day he would die. And he was afraid of death, because his life had been evil and he could not know what was in store for him beyond the grave, particularly if he died by violence.”

He was interrupted by a fit of coughing that left him spent and weak. His daughter brought him a glass of water and after a pause he went on, “ I am not well; I have not been well since I left Dartmoor. Latterly I grew worse and two months ago I consulted a doctor. He told me that I had not much longer to live. Six years against eighteen. Was Jonas to cheat me after all?

“ I had studied the situation before and knew that I could not enter the house except by strategy. I watched the servant. Since he used to go a great deal to Kastamuni’s I made it my business to be there when he arrived. One day I heard Kastamuni tell him that he had a chance to bid for a mummy case and asked the old servant if he wanted the case. The next day the servant came in and ordered the mummy case. Then I knew that my problem was solved. I examined the wooden case when it was standing open in Kastamuni’s store and I bought a new lock for it by the simple expedient of taking the

impression of the old one. I was aware of the fact that Jonas had his purchases brought in at night through the vault door."

"So that was how Fielding knew he could buy a mummy case," commented McKelvie. "I wondered how he found one so opportunely."

"What grudge did you bear Granya that you should have dragged her into your schemes?" demanded Norris, breaking into the conversation indignantly.

"She was Andrew's daughter," responded Farrell harshly. "She was a Howe. My innocent daughter had suffered through the perfidy of the Howes. Was she then to escape judgment? I had decided to exact full vengeance. I sent her a letter asking her to meet me at the Fourth Avenue house as I had something to tell her concerning her mother's past."

"He tricked me," exclaimed Granya, speaking for the first time. "I had always been curious about my mother and Aunt Marietta would never satisfy my curiosity. That is why I went. When I knocked at the door Mr. Farrell opened to me. I entered and that is all I remember for several hours."

"I had to go to the theater. That was to be my alibi, so I chloroformed her and left her in the empty house until I returned later to fix

the wooden box," explained Farrell, pleased with his ingenuity.

"How did you open the door, Mr. Farrell? Did you have a key to the Fourth Avenue house?" asked McKelvie.

"No. I cut a hole in the window pane and entered through the basement. The front door could be opened from the inside without a key."

"And you made Granya Howe help you with the lock of the wooden box?" continued McKelvie.

"Yes." It was Granya who answered agitatedly. "He swore that granddaddy would pay if I so much as said one word of what had happened to me, and he made me hold the light while he changed the lock on the box in the yard. Then he made me help him carry the mummy case to the cellar door. It was very heavy and I stumbled on the stairs. I remember falling and hearing a terrific crash. The next thing I knew I was lying on the floor bound and gagged."

"I intended to leave her there, but somehow she managed to get away ——" said Farrell.

"There was some glass on the floor and after hours and hours of work with a small piece I severed the cord and was able to release myself. I climbed out the window. It was dark and

snowing hard. I walked around awhile in a sort of daze until I met a policeman and he directed me to a drug store. And while I was phoning I saw Mr. Farrell come into the store and I was so frightened that I just dropped down to the bottom of the booth from sheer terror." She hid her face with a shudder against Norris' coat and he drew her closer reassuringly.

"I wish you wouldn't interrupt," Farrell said peevishly. "I have only a little longer and I have much to tell. I hid in the box and locked myself in. I had taken the precaution to bore several air holes in the box so there was no danger of suffocation. I did not know how long I might have to remain inside. When I thought it was safe, I climbed out, relocked the box and hid in the vault. I knew that Jonas would come down and I was afraid to move around as I did not know what traps he might have set to catch me. It was something of a blow when he brought you down with him, Mr. Norris."

"I can imagine," remarked Norris ironically. "Did you contemplate killing me, too?"

"There was nothing else for me to do," replied Farrell morosely. "I did not ask you to interfere in my affairs. I overheard the conversation between you. Since you were of his breed, I felt your death would be justified. When you

stepped on that trick tread and the cry rang out I almost betrayed myself. I had to crouch into a very small space when you started to examine the vault and once I thought you must have seen me. Later when I saw you bending over the box, I took my chance and put out the light. I heard a scuffle and a groan. My flashlight revealed you unconscious and Jonas standing behind the box. When he saw me he was struck dumb with fear. I told him just why I was there and I killed him as I would have scotched a snake. Then I pinned my justification on his breast with the scarf pin he had given me so long ago."

"What made you use that particular dagger?" asked McKelvie.

"I had found it on the girl and I decided to use it to leave no trace of my presence. I had been going to use a weapon of my own. But chance provided me with the better instrument, since then the police would be led astray. After the deed, I went up the steps and hid in the library. I was looking for possible incriminating papers. Then you went for the police and I took advantage of your stupidity in leaving the doors open to walk out and go home."

"What would you have done if Mr. Norris hadn't left the doors open? How had you

planned to leave the place?" demanded McKelvie.

"I knew that the servant had the keys. I had intended to wait in the vault until he came down to look for Jonas. It would not have been difficult to overpower him and take possession of the keys."

"Why did you take the key to the vault from Jonas Fielding?"

"I didn't want the police to lock the vault. I thought I might find it necessary to return there. In fact I did go back to look for the papers that Arlita afterwards discovered."

"And it was you who dropped the watch in the drug store?" inquired Norris.

"Yes," Farrell answered wearily. "I had taken it from Jonas' bedroom. It must have slipped from my pocket when I stooped to recover your wallet. I went in behind you to have a good look at you, Mr. Norris. I had to know whom I had to fear."

His head sank upon his breast and he closed his eyes as though he were no longer conscious that any one was present in the room.

Arlita Farrell turned to Granya. "I'm sorry, my dear, that you should have been involved in this affair. I hope you will forgive my father in the course of time. He was deeply injured

and on that subject he was not entirely sane."

Granya smiled tremulously. "I forgive him," she said gently. "If it had not been for him, I might never have met Philip Norris," and she laid her hand ever so lightly on the bowed shoulder of Arlita's father.

In the hall the actress drew McKelvie aside. "Are you going to inform headquarters, Mr. McKelvie?" she asked in a low tone.

"No, Miss Farrell," replied McKelvie seriously. "Jonas Faraday reaped as he had sowed."

"Thank you," she answered simply, the hard eyes softening. "The doctor told me only yesterday that my father cannot live out the month."

CHAPTER XXVII

CONCLUSION

“ARE you going to inform headquarters?” Norris voiced Arlita Farrell’s query as he drove away from Gramercy Park.

McKelvie, who was occupying the tonneau, since Granya had usurped the place beside Norris, leaned forward and answered, “No, Phil. I promised Miss Farrell that I would not.”

“Why, Mac?”

“Mr. Farrell is not a criminal in the usual sense of the word. His was a peculiar form of mental aberration born of eighteen years of brooding upon one subject. In the same circumstances you or I, Phil, would have developed the complex for revenge, a cell-born monomania that ate like a canker into his soul. He was really insane on the subject.”

“But the man is dangerous, Mac, whatever you may say to excuse him. He has a grudge against Granya and he is far better behind bars,” exclaimed Norris.

McKelvie shook his head. “The man is dying. Let him pass away in peace. Miss

Howe is perfectly safe. If she had not ventured to make inquiries about the murder, he would not have tried to injure her again."

"You are right, Mr. McKelvie," answered the girl. "I went to Mr. Farrell's house and he invited me in. I asked him point-blank if he had taken the dagger, and told him that I needed his assurance to clear myself of suspicion. He told me he would explain everything to my satisfaction if I would accompany him to Mr. Faraday's house. I never thought of the danger to myself. For Phil's sake, I wanted to vindicate ——"

"Don't say anything more," begged Norris, taking her hand. "I know I made an awful fool of myself ——"

"You were perfectly justified to doubt me," she murmured.

McKelvie broke in with an ironical smile, "Miss Howe, why did you carry the dagger with you the night before the murder?"

"Granddaddy had given it to me that morning and I had forgotten to take it to Mr. Kastamuni. As long as I was going out that night I decided I would deliver the dagger when I returned from Fourth Avenue. I have been to Mr. Kastamuni's store at night before. He lives at the back and he and granddaddy often

have heated discussions in the parlor about idols, and mummies and things of that sort."

"Why, then, were you afraid to tell us where you had lost the dagger?" asked Norris.

"I wasn't sure where I had lost it. And after what Mr. McKelvie said about accusing innocent persons, I was naturally diffident about saying anything against Mr. Farrell. Besides, I didn't know his name at that time and, moreover, I recalled his threat to injure granddaddy if I spoke of having been kidnapped."

"In other words you didn't trust me, eh?" said McKelvie shrewdly.

She blushed. "I didn't know you very well and I thought you might be working against my interests, Mr. McKelvie. Besides, Miss Farrell had cautioned me to say nothing to any one about the crime as it would only make trouble for those I loved. She hinted that my people were really to blame."

"Ah," returned McKelvie, "Miss Farrell has proved herself worthy of admiration. She has certainly been a devoted daughter, even if one cannot quite commend her attitude in the matter of her marriages. She told me, Phil — while you were helping Miss Howe into the car — that she divined that her father had committed the crime and that she lied to us and later stole

Jonas Faraday's papers to shield Mr. Farrell from the consequences of his deed. Also she warned Miss Howe to keep away from Gramercy Park and not to answer any more anonymous notes."

"Warm praise, Mac. And he pretends to be a misogynist," murmured Norris to Granya.

"I believe in giving the devil his due," replied McKelvie coolly. "Miss Farrell deserves some compensation for her barren childhood."

"Hirshkoff will supply that," retorted Norris. "To get back to the original discussion. When did you begin to suspect that Mr. Farrell had committed the crime?"

"When I was wondering where next to look for Miss Howe. I recalled that Miss Farrell had warned the girl and, in thinking over the words we heard that night at the theater, I came to the conclusion that the actress was concerned for her father. Besides, the clue of the watch should have given me the answer when I had received that cable from London about Mr. Farrell. Because it apparently cleared him of connection with your uncle, I allowed the watch clue to escape my mind."

"I don't understand. The watch was Farrell's, wasn't it?"

"Yes, but the curl of hair belonged to Jonas

Faraday's daughter. We proved that Farrell had never met this daughter, therefore the only person who could have put the lock into the watch was Jonas himself. *Ergo* he must have been in possession of the watch and, since Farrell dropped it in the drug store immediately following the murder, he must have been on the scene of the crime."

"Not necessarily. He might have taken the watch from Uncle Jonas before the latter came to New York, or Miss Farrell herself might have taken it when she was Uncle Jonas' wife," objected Norris.

McKelvie smiled. "In that case the lock of hair would have been missing. Any reminder of Jonas Faraday would have been destroyed. Didn't you notice that the curl was gone when he showed us the watch tonight?"

"One thing more. Where did Arlita Farrell get the brooch she wore? She claimed Andrew Howe gave it to her, but that could not have been so, since his scarf pin was made into this ring." Norris touched the band of gold on Granya's finger.

"Jonas Faraday also had a scarf pin. He had it made into a brooch and gave it to Miss Farrell when he married her. She wore it to remind her that between them there could be nothing

but hatred since he was the destroyer of her father's happiness. It seems that your uncle appealed to her for protection after she came to live with her father in Gramercy Park."

At Stuyvesant Square, McKelvie bade Norris and Granya good night.

"Thank you, Mac, for successfully solving this problem. Without you we should still be groping in the dark," said Norris.

"I don't know about that. I can't say that I was particularly brilliant. If your brain had not been befogged with love, you would have arrived at a solution as readily as I. Good night and good luck."

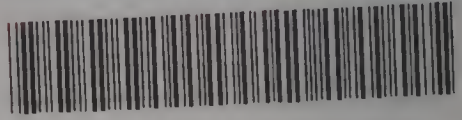
When he was gone, Granya laughed. "That was rather a left-handed compliment he paid you." She tilted her rose-tinted face toward him. "Is your brain befogged with love, Phil?" she asked saucily.

Norris looked down into her bright eyes. "I'm completely swamped," he told her and took her in his arms.

THE END

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